









# **IS CHRISTIANITY TRUE ?**

*First printed January 1933*  
*Second impression February 1933*

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN FOR  
EVRE AND SPOTTISWOODE (PUBLISHERS) LIMITED

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# **IS CHRISTIANITY TRUE ?**



I.

HOTEL BELLEVUE,  
KLEINE SCHEIDEGG.  
18th March, 1932.

DEAR JOAD,

I accept your challenge to discuss Christianity in a series of letters in spite of the fact that I am supposed to be engaged on a book, somewhat similar in scope, with J. B. S. Haldane. Haldane, however, has only written one letter in the last six months, and I am beginning to suspect that he will appear before his Maker before I have succeeded in convincing him that his Maker exists. I have written to him to say that I am accepting your challenge on the understanding that we confine ourselves to Christianity in particular, rather than to the alleged conflict between science and supernaturalism which is to be the theme of my letters with Haldane if those letters are ever written.

I suggest that you and I should divide our correspondence into two parts, in the first of which you might perhaps explain why you are not a Christian, and in the second of which I shall explain why I am.

I accept your challenge with great pleasure.

In the first place, though we differ on fundamental issues, we are not personally antipathetic. When we first discussed this book you said that you would never agree to exchange controversial letters over a period of months with a man whom you disliked. Nor should I; and I feel that the ritualistic handshake which we shall exchange before we start hammering away at each other is not purely formal. We have certain tastes in common; the reproductions of Italian and Dutch primitives which hang round your library reassured me when I first called on you. There is always hope for a man, however perverse his views, who prefers Van Eyck to the post-impressionists.

Secondly, you are a good controversialist, with whom it will be a pleasure to cross swords. I admired your handling of Mr. Cohen in your debate with that sturdy survivor of



Victorian materialism. And you are not only an expert, but also a good-tempered controversialist. You give and take hard blows, as I have good reason to know, with imperturbable good-humour. It should be as easy for a controversialist to keep his temper when the argument runs against him as for a chess-player to avoid hurling the board on to the floor when mate is threatened; and good-humoured controversialists are rare. Nothing is more cramping to controversy than a sensitive opponent who construes as personal a purely impersonal attack on the arguments which he has advanced. It is a relief to feel that you and I prefer to dispense with the buttons on our foils.

In the third place, I welcome this correspondence because I admire your philosophical writings, which are lucid and well expressed.

In the fourth place, I welcome this correspondence because I do not in the least admire your religious writings, which are confused, badly expressed and plagiaristic. There is evidence of hard thinking in every line that you write on philosophy, but you give your brain a rest when you turn to the uncongenial subject of Christianity. You may console yourself, however, with the reflection that in this respect you are not unique. In your attitude towards Christianity, you are a child of your age, an age which has decided that all standards of sober criticism may be suspended when Christianity is in the dock. H. G. Wells, Huxley and many another modern prophet display in their attitude to the greatest of all problems the same distressing blend of glib assurance and ignorance. In due course I must try to diagnose the malady, but first I must convince you that you yourself are suffering from this modern complaint. My examples are all taken from your book, *The Present and Future of Religion* (Benn).

\* \* \* \* \*

You are the head of a Department of Philosophy in London University College, and I am sure that you do your best to inculcate in your students a respect for the rules which should govern all philosophic enquiry in a debate. I am convinced that you would deal faithfully with one of your pupils who based an attack on, say, Plato, on a trite misquotation from his works. Now of all trite misquotations,

none is more trite than the vulgar variation of the Catechism which is so popular with people who are anxious to prove that the Church has consistently struggled to keep the under-dog under. Unfortunately for the purposes of this argument the Catechism does not, as you suggest, invite the catechist to "be content with that state of life unto which it HAS," but to do his duty (a very different matter) in that state of life "unto which it SHALL please God to call me."

Even more surprising is your misuse of the word "substance" in your allusions to the doctrine of transubstantiation, for in this connection it is clearly incorrect to use the word "substance" in its vulgar rather than in its philosophical sense. "Substance" in philosophy means, as you must know, the exact opposite to the "substance" of vulgar speech. The "substance" of ordinary speech corresponds to the "accidents" of philosophic discussion. The accidents of bread are its weight, shape, taste, smell, etc. The accidents can be detected by the five senses; the substance which underlies phenomena cannot. Catholics believe that the substance of a consecrated wafer is transformed into the substance of Our Lord's Body, and as transubstantiation is not a chemical process, you have no reason valiantly to proclaim that "we no longer hold the chemical theory that bread, water and other objects can be changed into substances of a different order by special processes."

I hope that when you have read this letter *you* will no longer hold that anybody ever held such views. "An eminent English bishop," you write, "recently issued a challenge to all and sundry to distinguish by tasting, touching, smelling, reducing to their ultimate chemical constituents, or subjecting to any other test, any difference between a consecrated and an unconsecrated wafer. The authorities of the Church did not take up the challenge."

Of course not. It is not the duty of the Church to accept challenges from people who have not taken the trouble to discover the point at issue.

You are entitled to attack with vigour the doctrine of transubstantiation, but I suggest that it is an offence against the amenities of scholarly controversy to caricature a belief which has been held and is still held by many millions of men,

among whom some few at least are not inferior to yourself in intellectual attainment. Such a travesty of a central doctrine of Catholicism makes it difficult even for those who are most charitable to attribute to your printer rather than to yourself the responsibility for the confusion between the Aryans and Arians, but perhaps it is unreasonable to expect a writer who regards all Christian dogma as absurd to waste much time in sorting out Arius the heresiarch from the Aryan race.

All you modern critics of Christianity seem to suffer from thought-shyness the moment you begin to discuss this subject. J. B. S. Haldane, for instance, is a man of outstanding intellectual gifts, and yet in all good faith he puts this sort of thing on to paper: "The old religions are full of outworn science, including the astronomical theory of a solid heaven, the chemical theory that water, bread, books and other objects can be rendered holy by special processes, and the physiological theory that a substance called the soul leaves the body at the moment of death" (*Possible Worlds*, p. 236).

It is science, not Christianity, which is full of outworn science. The solidity of heaven is not a belief imposed on Christians of any denomination; and it would be easier to deal with the concluding paragraph if Haldane would define precisely what he means by "a substance called the soul."

You were apparently struck by these remarks of Haldane, for you reproduced them, almost unchanged and without quotation marks, in your book. "We no longer hold," you write, "the biological theory of man as a special creation, the astronomical theory of a solid heaven and a fixed earth, the chemical theory that bread, water and other objects can be changed into substances of a different order by special processes, or the physiological theory that a substance called the soul leaves the body at death."

Lord Iddesleigh, a Roman Catholic, challenged you in the *Evening Standard* to give the name of any priest who taught the doctrine of "a solid Heaven and a fixed earth." You replied by quoting from the Psalms, "Who laid the foundations of the earth that it should not be removed for ever." And the reply pleased you so much that you have repeated it in your book.

## A CHALLENGE

There is such a thing as poetry, and even the most ardent of Bible Christians does not maintain that the planets indulge in community singing because the Bible says that "the morning stars sang together."

One of these days you must really read St. Thomas Aquinas, if only to discover that many centuries ago St. Thomas laid down certain rules for the interpretation of the Bible which, had you followed them, would have saved you from accusing the Psalmist of teaching that the foundations of the earth were irremovable. "When Scripture speaks," wrote St. Thomas, "of God's Arm, the literal sense is not that God has such a member, but only what he signifies by this member, namely, operative power. . . ." It is perhaps hardly polite to continue the quotation, "The very hiding of truth in figures is useful for the exercise of thoughtful minds, and as a defence against the ridicule of the impious, according to the words, 'Give not that which is holy to dogs.' "

My complaint against you, Mr. Wells and Professor Julian Huxley, is that you are all so unscientific in your attitude to Christianity. It is unscientific to criticise a document without reading it; it is unscientific to bludgeon your opponent with unsupported assertions and unsubstantiated charges. All of you repeat, like a lesson learnt by rote at your mother's knee, the old, stale, stupid charge that the dogmas of the Church are at variance with science. None of you has ever deigned to give chapter and verse to this accusation. The Roman Catholic Church is usually represented as the most hostile to science of all churches, and the most reactionary. I therefore offer you these alternatives. Either name a doctrine, *de fide* for Roman Catholics, which is at variance with the proven results of scientific research, or admit that you have made charges which you cannot substantiate.

When I read the modern prophets I am impressed by their habit of passing on undocumented sneers and unsubstantiated criticism. There is a painful lack of originality about their attacks on Christianity. In your philosophical work, you are at great pains to think out things for yourself, and your work is, in consequence, interesting and original. But any stick is good enough for Christianity. The same feeble, brittle twig is passed along from hand to hand in order to

save yourselves the trouble of cutting yet another decaying branch from the decaying tree. A short time ago I read, from the pen of a writer whose literary criticism is both original and brilliant, the following passage which appeared in one of those religious symposiums with which the Press favour us from time to time:

“Ecclesiastics who talk about the Virgin Birth are as absurd as persons would be who, having been visited by the wisest man in the world, stopped repeating his wisdom to an audience longing to hear it and wrangled whether he had travelled to their home by a bus or a tramcar.”

I was less impressed by this passage than you seem to have been, to judge from the following passage in your book: “We are regaled with disputes about the Virgin Birth. The earth, we are given to understand, was visited some two thousand years ago by a man whose wisdom was so pre-eminent that it has seemed to many to partake of the divine. The Church, it is to be presumed, is the inheritor of that wisdom, or, if not its inheritor, at least its trustee. Reverently approaching, we ask that the teaching of this great visitor to our planet should be interpreted for us in the light of the needs of our times. And his trustees meet our request with a profound discourse upon how the distinguished personage travelled to visit us!”

If this planet was visited by a Martian, the first question we should ask would be how he travelled here, and I cannot see why it should be considered unreasonable for those who believe that God visited this planet to show some interest in the manner of his arrival. Be that as it may, if you want to make merry at the expense of those who attach importance to the Church’s teaching on the subject of the Virgin Birth, you might at least state their views correctly. Orthodox Christians do not regard Christ as “a man whose wisdom was so pre-eminent that it has seemed to many to partake of the divine.” If they did, they would not believe in the Virgin Birth. They worship Jesus as God—a very different matter.

I am convinced that if, instead of repeating silly remarks, which have already been made once too often before you reproduced them, you had taken the trouble to think out an alternative to orthodox teaching on this subject, you would

have realised that whether Christ was or was not born of a Virgin, the orthodox Christian cannot be blamed for taking this question seriously.

For what are the alternatives? The early enemies of Christianity circulated a foul lie to the effect that Mary was the paramour of a Roman soldier, and that Jesus was their son; nor can Christians be expected to welcome as an alternative the theory that myth and legend are embedded in the Gospel record. Those who believe that the Gospels are good history cannot regard any attack on their historical accuracy with indifference. The clerical wrangles, over which you make merry, are certainly no less significant, and are concerned with far graver issues, than those wrangles between rival philosophers which you find so interesting.

You have, I am sure, read Mr. Wells's delightful fantasy, *The Time Machine*. I should like to book a ticket for Mr. Wells himself to the thirteenth century. If only our modern prophets could spend a term at the mediæval university of Paris, their religious writings would gain in clarity and in logic. They would certainly learn that an *ipse dixit* is no adequate substitute for an argument, nor assertion for proof, nor metaphor for thought.

"Scholasticism," as Professor Whitehead, whose authority as a scientific writer is undisputed, tells us, "inculcated one valuable habit which remained long after scholastic philosophy had been repudiated—the priceless habit of looking for an exact point and sticking to that point when one found it. The Middle Ages formed one long training of the intellect of Europe in the sense of order." The ineffectiveness of the commercial travellers in modern religions is due to the fact that they are under contract not to travel theism, and are consequently compelled to supply a synthetic substitute for God. "I'm sorry, ma'am," one can imagine them saying; "I can't supply you with 'God.' We don't touch those old-fashioned lines, but here's an up-to-date article guaranteed to produce the same result. We call it 'Life.' . . . Oh no, ma'am, not the common sort of life which was handed out to you when you were born, but something much more superior." And they would then proceed to read the write-up of "Life," which will be found on page 190 of your book:

"Life, then, I think of as an instinctive thrust or urge appearing initially in an alien environment, a dead world of chaos and blankness and matter. Life is purposive, but its purpose is at first latent, and only rises into consciousness in the course of life's evolution and development. Life evolves and develops by infusing itself into the material universe. . . . In the course of its development life achieves the faculty of consciousness, and comes at last to a knowledge of the fact, and a glimmering of the purpose, of its evolution."

I am not clear what we have gained by dropping the word "God," which has a clear-cut meaning, and substituting the word "Life," to which you attach a private meaning of your own. St. Thomas Aquinas began, in his old-fashioned way, with an axiom that nobody could dispute, the axiom that "it is certain and obvious to our senses that some things are in motion," and proceeded by a series of syllogisms to deduce the existence of a personal God. You begin, not with an axiom which nobody could dispute, but with a series of wildly improbable dogmatic assertions. St. Thomas never failed to put himself in the place of an intelligent and enquiring reader; he never wrote a paragraph without asking himself what possible objection could be raised against the conclusion which he supported, or what question might be asked by a critical reader. The paragraph I have quoted from your work is full of unanswered questions:

1. How would you define "life"?
2. How did "life" originate?
3. How did "life" acquire an "instinctive thrust or urge"? What do you mean in this connection by (a) "instinctive," and (b) "thrust"?
4. Whence did "life" obtain the motive power to "thrust"?
5. What do you mean by describing "life" as "purposive"?
6. How did "life" acquire purpose?
7. How does "life" rise into consciousness?
8. How is "life" related to personality, and how is your individual life related to "life"?
9. You say that "life" "gradually comes to a glimmering of the purpose of its evolution." Has "its evolution" a purpose, and whence came this purpose?

## "LIFE" AS A SYNONYM FOR GOD

This sort of thing, my dear Joad, imposes a greater strain on our credulity than the first chapter of Genesis.

St. Thomas Aquinas, who lived in an age which believed in reason, offered severe proof for every statement in his vast array of works. We, who live in an age of faith, must be less exacting. We must take "Life" on trust; we must ask no questions; we must not seek to escape from the vague hinterland of metaphor into the clear light of thought; we must believe implicitly in the illumination granted by "life" to its interpreter, Mr. Joad.

It has just occurred to me that one or two of my remarks might be misconstrued as aggressive, and this would be a pity, for it is precisely because I respect the high quality of your best work that I am forced, more in sorrow than in anger, to complain bitterly of your attitude to Christianity. When we first met—before the possibility of this correspondence had been broached—I suggested that we might arrange a public debate on the evidence for the Resurrection, and you replied that you had not enough time "to mug up the evidence." Now the Resurrection, if it occurred, was the most important event in the history of our planet, and while it seems strange to me that a distinguished philosopher such as yourself should never have found time "to mug up the evidence" for or against the Resurrection, it seems even stranger that you should have devoted so much of your time, in the Press and elsewhere, to condemning Christianity, whose credentials you have never examined. A distinguished Jesuit once remarked to me that he would approach the study of Buddhism, or indeed of any other religion, with vastly more reverence than you moderns vouch to Christianity. Life is clearly too short to examine the case for every creed, but there is something to be said for making a rule never to refer with contempt to any religion unless one has made an effort to investigate its claims. I happen, for instance, to regard Calvinism with contempt, but I refrained from expressing any opinion on this subject until I had taken the trouble to read Calvin's *Institutes*. And if even Calvinism should not be condemned unheard, surely the great religion of which Calvinism is an evil perversion deserves a more



courteous hearing than it receives from our modern prophets. Here is a religion which has transformed the face of Europe and revolutionised the fabric of society, a religion which has profoundly affected every aspect of human activity from law to architecture. Surely it should be regarded as an integral part of a liberal education to master, at least in outline, the philosophy, history and ethics of a religion which was accepted for centuries without question by the civilised world. It is a sin against culture to ignore Christianity; and it is an offence against good breeding to adopt an attitude of contemptuous superiority towards any creed which still commands the adherence of men of undisputed intellectual attainments.

And is it not passing strange that writers who are too idle to study Christianity, and too unchivalrous to refrain from travestying a faith which has evoked such tremendous loyalties from men of every race and of every class, should never suspect that they may perhaps have missed some clue to the secret of this ancient spell?

Unfortunately, the modern world is becoming more and more thought-shy on the subject of Christianity. The mental fashion of the age prevents most people from approaching this problem with an open mind. It is an attitude of mind which recurs from age to age, for Christianity (like Charles II) is an unconscionably long time in dying and (unlike Charles II) is still alive.

Our moderns are not the first to be deceived in their diagnosis of this perverse patient. "It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted, by many persons," wrote the greatest of eighteenth-century bishops, Bishop Butler, "that Christianity is not so much a subject for enquiry; but that it is, now at length, discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all persons of discernment; and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals, for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world."

I do not suggest that you are ambitious to set up Christianity as a subject for "mirth and ridicule." There are passages in your book which suggest a considerable sympathy

## THE OBSTINATE INVALID

with its æsthetic appeal and for its mystical aspects. I do not think you would have challenged me to defend Christianity unless you had begun to suspect that some sort of a case could be established for this obstinate invalid, which has refused to succumb to the displeasure of H. G. Wells, to the disapproval of Julian Huxley, and to the genial contempt of Bertrand Russell.

And perhaps in your heart of hearts you will agree that a man writes himself down as a hopeless Philistine if he speaks with ignorant contempt of the faith which produced St. Francis, which inspired Dante, and which found expression in the canvases of Bellini and in the stones of Venice. Even if I believed Christianity to be a myth, I should still salute with melancholy respect the superstition which had inspired such supreme artists in song, in paint and in stone, and should still find it difficult to understand how a mere superstition could take form in so noble a synthesis of spiritual and secular beauty. In the course of this correspondence we shall no doubt hear a great deal about the crimes of Christianity. I will not try to anticipate your attack, but I suggest that you cannot in common decency damn Christianity for the Inquisition without thanking Christianity for Chartres.

Yours ever,

ARNOLD LUNN.

NOTE.—Since this letter was written Professor Haldane, who had been extremely busy with his book *Causes of Evolution*, has resumed his correspondence with me, and has proved both by the frequency (and brilliance) of his letters that the pessimism of the opening paragraph of this letter was unjustified (Nov. 30, 1932).

## II.

BRONDANW,  
PENRHYNDEUDRAETH,  
MERIONETH.  
*April 19th, 1932.*

DEAR LUNN,

I.—I see that I shall have to keep my weather eye more or less permanently open throughout this correspondence, if I am not to be tripped, trapped, bogged, entangled, convicted of inconsistency and question begging, and subjected to every conceivable form of intellectual discomfiture. For from the very outset you have succeeded in putting me in a quandary.

The correspondence, you say, is to be divided into two parts. In the first, I am to take the offensive and begin by explaining why I am not a Christian; in the second, you are to explain why you are. An admirable arrangement, I thought, and was beginning to consider with myself precisely why it is that I am unable to call myself a Christian, when I found my reflections interrupted and myself assailed by a whole miscellany of charges, ranging from my misspelling of the word "Arians" to the manners of modern scientists (Why, by the way, will you insist on classing me with modern scientists? Not only am I innocent of science, but I spend even more of my time in getting into the hot water of the scientists than I do into that of the Christians), and distracted by a variety of arguments ranging from the different uses of the word "substance" in philosophy and common parlance, to the insinuation that Christianity must be true because it produced Chartres Cathedral and because Dante—or, may I add, Darwin (?)—believed in it. I then find myself treated to a little homily backed by quotations from Whitehead and the authority of St. Thomas Aquinas on the duty of sticking to the point.

Now this is really very cunning of you; for, however I proceed, you have me hip and thigh. If I answer the charges and try to deal with the arguments, I shall be reproached for

not getting on with my allotted task of saying why I am not a Christian, and you will let off your big guns, Whitehead and St. Thomas Aquinas, at me for not sticking to the point. If, on the other hand, I begin with a statement of my reasons for not being a Christian, I shall be told that I have not answered the charges, and admonished that the reason why I have not is that I do not know how to answer them.

So you see that by virtue of not sticking to any point yourself, but threatening me with Whitehead and St. Thomas Aquinas if I do not, you have managed to have me both ways. After careful consideration, I have decided not to follow you in your preliminary bat-like flittings over the whole arena of the controversy, but to concentrate on one point only, and then to get on with the job which you have assigned to me.

On reflection, you will, I think, agree that I am right in this. To expound or to defend my own philosophy, which at the close of your letter is what you seem to require of me, would clearly be not to the present purpose, which is to discuss Christianity; while, if I were to apologise for my misspelling of "Arians," explain what you seem to think a bad joke about the Virgin Birth, and generally dot the i's and cross the t's of my *Present and Future of Religion*, I should simply bore our readers, who will not be the least interested in whether my book is fool-proof or not, and, if they really want to know what I say, can read it for themselves. The boring of readers of a jointly written book is as disastrous for one author as it is for the other—I am not sure, by the way, that you have not already begun the process in your first letter—and it is to your interest as much as mine that I should not continue it. Moreover, I have a shrewd suspicion that, if I deal faithfully with your one main point as it deserves, many of the subsidiary matters which in your letter appear as a scattered miscellany of general charges will be found to fall into their places as the co-ordinated parts of a continuous argument.

II.—The point upon which I have decided to concentrate is your frequently reiterated complaint that modern writers will not take Christianity seriously. They are, you say, hopelessly unscientific in their treatment of it. I cannot, of course,

speaking for the other moderns with whom you class me, but for my own part I am disposed to agree that this is so. Of this agreement I make you a present, although, when I have explained my reasons for it, I doubt if you will derive much comfort from the gift. For what you term our unscientific attitude to Christianity there are, I think, three main reasons.

(1) First, there is the incurable frivolity of the arguments by which it is defended. Considerations to which nobody would dream of attaching weight in any other connection are persistently put forward by supporters of Christianity, whom no amount of disappointment seems to deter from expressing a pained surprise when sensible men fail to be impressed by them. Take, for example, the sort of argument which occurs at the end of your letter, the Dante-Chartres type of argument. Christianity, you say, inspired Dante; Dante is a great poet; therefore, presumably, one would be a Philistine if one did not appreciate him; therefore, one would be a Philistine if one treated without proper respect the faith which inspired him. Again, Chartres Cathedral is beautiful; Christianity produced it; therefore one must thank Christianity for it. Well and good! I have no particular objection to your going on in this way. But what conceivable bearing have these considerations upon the question at issue? What we are discussing is "Whether Christianity is true?" You contribute to the discussion by pointing out that it is worthy of respect and gratitude because it produced Dante and Chartres. Does "worthy of respect and gratitude" mean the same thing as "true"? Is there, indeed, any necessary connection between the possession of these attributes and truth? If it doesn't and there isn't, I cannot see what possible relevance the citation of cases of this kind has to the issue. If it does and there is, then clearly such relevance as they possess extends far beyond Christianity. Plato is a great prose writer whose style is the envy of all philosophers; is the philosophy, then, which he uses it to expound, true? Or is the Hindu religion true because of the beautiful writing of the Bhagavadgita? Obviously not from your point of view, since, if Hinduism is true, Christianity cannot be. Similarly with the argument from the goodness of St. Francis. I do not understand how you can expect me to

## FRIVOLITY OF CHRISTIAN ARGUMENTS

accept as evidence of the truth of Christianity the fact that many great and good men have believed in it, unless you are also prepared to accept the virtue of Asoka, the greatest absolute monarch the world has known, as evidence of the truth of the Buddhism which inspired him, or the wisdom of Lao-Tse as evidence of the truth of Taoism. Or, to bring the point nearer home, what are we to say of the great and eminent men who, identifying themselves with particular Christian doctrines, regarded rival doctrines with horrified indignation? Milton and Bunyan, for example, were Puritans who revered the Bible and whose writings are inspired by a doctrinal bias which owes much of its fervour to their shocked horror of Rome. Dante and Fra Angelico are eminent Catholics whose work, inspired by Catholicism, is said to evince in a pre-eminent degree the peculiar qualities by which the Catholic Church has been traditionally distinguished and ennobled.

Are we, then, to say that the doctrines of Catholicism are true because it produced Dante and Fra Angelico? Your argument, if it means anything at all, certainly requires me to suppose that they are. Yet, if they are, then clearly those of seventeenth-century English Puritanism are not, and the argument does not apply to Bunyan and Milton. Besides, you yourself have, I understand, recently affirmed that Catholicism is not true.

I am, as you see, at a loss how to treat these arguments of yours. If you mean them to be taken seriously, they can be used to prove the truth of practically every creed and sub-creed in which great men have believed. If you do not, I do not understand why you bring them forward.

Yet these arguments of yours seem to me to be typical of those upon which Christian apologists habitually rely; they are all of much the same intellectual stuff—and, in your own phrase, “poor stuff” it is—and I hope that, in showing why it is unreasonable to expect busy men to waste their time over them, I have shown also why we do not normally treat Christian apologetics with the respect you think they deserve.

(2) This mention of Catholics and Puritans brings me to my second reason, which is quite simply the difficulty of determining what this Christianity, which we are admonished

to treat scientifically, is. Christianity is not one body of doctrine; it is a complex of heterogeneous and frequently contradictory beliefs and practices. It should be unnecessary for me to remind you that the doctrines of mediæval Catholics, for example, are different from those of nineteenth-century Salvationists—not less different than the types of people who respectively professed them. Christianity is riddled with, indeed, it is composed of, these differences. What, I beg you to enlighten me, is there in common between the beliefs of a mystic like St. Catherine of Siena and a revivalist tailor like Lodowick Muggleton, who, inspired by God and foretold in Revelations xi. 3, wrote “The Third and Last Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ”; or between a saint like Francis of Assisi and a real scarlet Pope like John XXIII;<sup>1</sup> or between an American Fundamentalist, all raw and blooming from Tennessee, and a sophisticated Modernist like Bishop Barnes or R. H. Major? What, I ask you, is the unifying core of doctrine that links all these various persons together? To what joint beliefs do they all subscribe? What sort of God or gods do they share? What common authority do they recognise? In answer to this last question I was in my innocence about to suggest the Bible, but the suggestion has been scotched by a recent reading of Motley’s *Rise of the Dutch Republic*, which informs me that addiction to reading the Bible was in the sixteenth-century Netherlands treated as black heresy, an offence which the ecclesiastical authorities dealt with by those pleasant methods of burning, racking, thumb-screwing, and flooding with water until the bellies of their victims split open, which Christians have traditionally inflicted upon those who ventured to take different views from their own of what Christianity is and requires.

Now these bewildering varieties of Christianity, varieties of teaching, of authority, of doctrine and of practice, are as convenient for you as they are disconcerting for me. Over and over again the critic of Christianity, who after a scrupulous examination of evidence and a careful marshalling of

<sup>1</sup> “The vicar of Christ was only accused of piracy, murder, rape, sodomy, and incest; the most scandalous charges were suppressed” (Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall*, vii, p. 325).

## ACCEPTANCE OF CHALLENGE

facts launches what he believes to be a telling attack upon a particular doctrine, finds himself baffled and his attack turned aside by the simple affirmation that the doctrine in question is no part of Christianity at all, and that no true Christian believes it, or ever has believed it.

This simple device is of the greatest value to Christian apologists. From the great variety of doctrines which Christians have historically held and for which ecclesiastical authority can be found, it is always open to them to select those which happen to be immune from attacks based on the textual criticism or scientific knowledge of the moment, to assert that these alone are true Christianity, and to discard those which are exposed to them.

If the would-be scientific investigator then turns his attention to some other doctrine, he finds that in turn discarded, so that, if you will forgive me for mixing my metaphors, to criticise Christianity is like assaulting a feather bed with the consistency of a jelly and the colours of a chameleon. You yourself, my dear Lunn, I have not the slightest doubt, will, when pressed, avail yourself of this admirable device. I am a generous opponent, and, in case you have not already thought of them, will make you a present of one or two examples of the way in which it may be effectively used.

You challenge me in your letter to produce a single doctrine in which Roman Catholics believe "which is at variance with the proven results of scientific research." I mention at once the doctrine of fixed types—that is, the doctrine that God created the different species of living organisms complete with the characteristics which they now possess, which contradicts the scientific view, supported by an immense accumulation of evidence, that they evolved by the gradual accumulation of small variations, or by sudden abrupt mutations from comparatively few and simple forms, perhaps from one only. I mention also the account of the Creation given in the first chapter of Genesis, according to which God created the world by a series of successive acts, which contradicts the teachings of astronomy and geology to the effect that its main features evolved slowly and continuously. I would quote from your own St. Thomas Aquinas writing in the thirteenth century to show that he



did in fact believe in fixed types and successive acts of creation which took place a few thousand years before his own time, were not his views too well known to need illustration here. Immediately you reply that Catholics may have held this doctrine once, but do not hold it now; or, if, in the face of Mr. Belloc's recent protestations of belief in fixed types, you cannot bring yourself to say this, you may urge that it is in Anglicanism and not in Roman Catholicism that the true Christian doctrine is enshrined, and that Anglicanism does not hold these unscientific views. To counter this and to make quite sure, I proceed to quote from two nineteenth-century divines, one Anglican and one Catholic, who denounce evolution as impious and contrary to the teaching of the Church, and subscribe to the most ingenious absurdities to explain away the evidence for it and for the real age of the earth.

Here, for example, is Bishop Wilberforce writing on Darwin's *Origin of Species*: "Now we must say at once, and openly, that such a notion"—*i.e.*, that Man evolved by natural selection—"is absolutely incompatible not only with single expressions in the word of God on that subject of natural science with which it is not immediately concerned, but, which in our judgment is of far more importance, with the whole moral and spiritual condition of man which is its proper subject-matter."

Here, again, is the Archbishop of Paris, preaching in Notre Dame in 1863: "In recent times some thinkers have tried to base their views as to the antiquity of the world on physical observations and researches in natural history. Particularly there have been alleged the displacement of the sea, the number and age of volcanoes, the multitude of fossils found in the earth, and the pretended incandescence of our globe. As for the erudition displayed on these matters, it is a pure loss, and can only serve to dazzle a few ignoramuses or to flatter some of our modern infidels who do but seek excuses and motives to continue in their irreligion." But having quoted these utterances, typical of hundreds, I find all the wind taken out of my sails by your simple repudiation in your correspondence with Father Ronald Knox of "the first chapter of Genesis as the heritage of an uncritical age."

## WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY ?

Or I take a geographical rather than a biological doctrine and quote to you Article III of the XXXIX Articles, which informs us that Christ having died for us "*went down*" (my italics) "into Hell," from which the plain inference seems to be that hell is somewhere underneath the earth; to which I suggest you reply either that "down" does not mean "down," or that the word "down," or, if you prefer it, the word "Hell," is used in a poetical sense only, or that nobody believes in the XXXIX Articles nowadays; and, although every Anglican priest has, I understand, to read them aloud and to affirm that he does believe in them, this line of defence is probably the best—the best, and also the most fashionable, for the practice of jettisoning Christian beliefs directly they become inconvenient has now gone so far that it is difficult to say what part of the initial corpus of Christian doctrine remains.

And so, my dear Lunn, once again you see our difficulty. Why should we give ourselves the trouble of subjecting a body of doctrine to scientific scrutiny, a process which, as you know, takes time and labour, with a view to discovering whether it is true or false, when at the end of our labour we shall be told, as likely as not, that the doctrines in question are not and never have been Christian doctrines, with a pitying contempt for our ignorance and a suggestion that we should keep up with the Christian times ?

Now all this, as I say, is very exasperating. What is more, it is going to be a continual embarrassment to me in my correspondence with you. What guarantee have I that the kind of Christianity you propose to defend is true Christianity, or that the interpretation you put upon controversial passages and doctrines is the correct one? For already, I see, you are beginning to avail yourself of the advantages I have pointed out to you.

The question which I am raising, let me remind you, is, What precisely is this Christianity which we are charged with treating unscientifically? What is the authoritative statement of it, and where is it to be found? A plausible, perhaps the most plausible, answer is, "In the Bible." Waiving uncomfortable doubts suggested by the fact, which I noted above, that Christians have subjected other Christians to the

most appalling tortures for reading the Bible—for example, in Spain and the Spanish Netherlands in the sixteenth century<sup>1</sup>—let us assume that it is in the Bible that the authoritative statement of Christianity is to be found, especially since it is an answer which you yourself seem disposed to make. Unlike most modern Churchmen,<sup>2</sup> you apparently “believe that the Gospels are good history,” and after soundly rating those of us who do not “examine the credentials” of that which we attack, proceed to contrast favourably, if a little complacently, the pains which you yourself have taken to read Calvin’s *“Institutes”* before venturing to attack Calvinism.

You would commend us, then, to the study of the Bible as an historical document. I go accordingly to the Bible, prepared to make careful notes of exactly what it says, only to find you asserting that the Bible does not mean what it says, and dismissing as mere poetry (see p. 7) whatever is plainly at variance with commonly recognised fact, with a shrug of pained surprise that people like myself should be too stupid to recognise poetry when we meet it. Not content with this, you hold up for my admiration St. Thomas’s canon of interpretation which informs us that, when the Bible speaks of “God’s Arm,” it does not mean “God’s Arm” but only “his operative power.” But if you are to disown the literal interpretation of the Bible whenever you find it convenient to do so, if you are entitled to dismiss the Psalms as “poetry” and the first chapter of Genesis as “the heritage of an uncritical age,” where is the process of deliteralising the Bible to stop? When is St. Thomas’s canon of interpretation to be applied, and when is it inapplicable? It must be within your knowledge that many modern Churchmen, Modernists I think they are called, apply it with such effect that, not content with relegating such Old Testament stories as Jonah and the whale to the category of mythology, they bring under the axe of liberal as opposed to literal interpretation the miracles of Christ, the conceptions of heaven and hell, the Virgin Birth, the Ascension, and even at a pinch the Resurrection.

If you will permit me to refer you to that book of mine

<sup>1</sup> You might with advantage have a look at Motley’s *Rise of the Dutch Republic*, pp. 170, 175, if your nerves are reasonably strong.

<sup>2</sup> See Bishop Gore’s *New Commentary*, p. 23, below.

## HOW MUCH IS LEFT ?

which you find such a stumbling-block, *The Present and Future of Religion*, you will find on page 50 an account of a recent work, *A New Commentary on the Bible*, which was published at the end of 1928 by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, and edited by Bishop Gore. I tell how in a review of this book the Bishop of Liverpool pointed out that the Bible is "rather a library of books, the writers of which, at various times and in various conditions of life, by divers pictures and in divers manners, declared their ideas about God and His dealings with man. . . . these are not intended to be understood as narratives of fact, but as vehicles of teaching."

I said then, and I repeat now, that the plain meaning of this seems to be that the Bible is not "the word of God," but a collection of human writings embodying human and, therefore, fallible ideas. In other words, doubt of all religious dogmas is admissible, while some—namely, those which purport to be narratives of actual fact—must not be taken to mean what they say. The doctrines rejected by the *New Commentary* as "not intended to be understood as narratives of fact" have been insisted on with passionate emphasis as forming part of a supreme divine revelation. They include the Creation story, the Flood story, the stories of David and Goliath, and of Jonah and the whale. These, it seems, are not historical, are probably untrue, and form no part of a divine revelation.

Once this sort of thing begins, I can see no end to it; for once this mode of interpretation is agreed to be legitimate, there is no way of assigning limits to its application. Hence I confidently look forward to further jettisonings in the future.

As with the history of the Bible, so with its ethics. Nothing could be plainer than Christ's teaching on the subject of non-resistance, with which I whole-heartedly agree. Yet, when in the last war people called conscientious objectors persisted in taking it seriously, maintaining Christ's doctrine of non-resistance and refusing to meet violence with violence, the Churches vied with the State in expressions of horrified indignation at their attitude, asserted that the plain meaning of Christ's words was not their meaning at all, and subjected those who acted in accordance with it to the most ferocious

persecution (sentences on C.O.'s of twenty years' imprisonment were, as you may remember, not uncommon occurrences), declaring at the same time that God had granted a dispensation from the observance of the sixth commandment for the duration of the war in respect of persons born in Germany. Nor have Christian clergymen ever been backward in invoking the authority of the Church to sanction the wholesale murder of "enemies," whenever Governments have deemed this course desirable. When the teaching of the Bible is so set at nought by the paid exponents of Christianity, when the very words of Christ Himself are denied whenever the Churches find it convenient to deny them, what possible assurance can we have that in concentrating upon the doctrines of the Bible we are in fact penetrating through the husk of irrelevant accretions to the kernel of Christianity?

Again you see our difficulty! You ask us to treat Christianity scientifically. But how can we treat a thing scientifically, if we do not know what it is; if, indeed, we have no assurance that it is anything at all?

My second reason has, I am afraid, taken time and space to elaborate. I comfort myself by the reflection that in the course of its elaboration I have managed to deal with a number of the miscellaneous considerations advanced in your letter, which at one time I despaired of reducing to any sort of order. Moreover, my third reason will be commendably short.

(3) I can best introduce it by referring to the passage in your letter where you say, and rightly, that Christianity has profoundly affected every aspect of human activity in the Western world, affirming that it is, at least in part, the architect of Western culture. "It is," you conclude, "a sin against culture to ignore Christianity"; and I agree that it would be a sin, if Christianity were in fact presented to us as a culture which we were at liberty to study, in so far as it interested, to embrace in so far as it attracted us. Christianity, objectively regarded, is a set of beliefs about the supernatural government of the universe, a set, one among many, which millions of human beings have embraced, which has inspired their art and moulded their lives. Other religions have done no less, and it is in this guise, that is to say, as beliefs historically

held, as cultures that have moulded civilisations, that other religions are presented to us.

But with Christianity it is not so. Upon our young and defenceless minds it was imposed as a set of dogmas which purported to be absolutely true. We were expected to learn these dogmas and to accept unquestioningly the beliefs they embodied. In accordance with this expectation the resources of my immature mind were taxed to remember Catechism and Collects, and my young and eager curiosities were blunted and dulled by lists of names and dates and the details of Old Testament legends. The facts that the Collects were meaningless, that the names and dates were for the most part of an almost incredible historical unimportance, and that the Old Testament stories were in the highest degree disreputable and disclosed a savage morality on the part of God and His appointed servants from which any civilised adult of the most moderate pretensions to virtue would recoil with horror, these facts, I say, were nothing to the point. These things were part of Christian doctrine; they were "Scripture," and we had to swallow them as best we could.

Most of us swallowed them greedily enough. The young mind is receptive rather than critical, a fact which should make us, but doesn't, all the more scrupulous in regard to the diet on which we feed it, and at sixteen, recently confirmed, I was an eager and believing Christian, accepting the Bible as a record of actual fact and earnestly striving to live the kind of life which had been enjoined upon me.

Then came disillusionment. I had been taught that, if I made requests to God for things I wanted, praying to Him long and earnestly and having faith, my prayers would be answered. I prayed to Him with all the fervour at my command for six months that I should get a scholarship, and, having faith, I was quite honestly convinced that I should get it. I didn't, nor were the subsequent assurances that "things" referred only to "spiritual things" and that God knew what was good for me better than I did, either consoling or convincing. The process of disillusionment once begun went far and fast. I discovered that many of the Bible stories were untrue, and that science, supported by an impressive weight of evidence and backed up by the plain

facts of experience, required us to suppose that many events had taken place quite otherwise than the Bible recorded. I saw that the Church treated this evidence dishonestly, first denying it and, when it could deny it no longer, affirming that it had no bearing upon the truths of Christianity, which, being spiritual, belonged to a sphere other than that of science. The statements once presented to me in "Scripture" as constituting a record of historical fact were, it now appeared, of spiritual significance only. Or weren't they? To this day I do not know. But perhaps you will enlighten me, affirming on what principle you know the story of the Resurrection to be history, and of the Creation myth.

Then came the war. I saw parsons turning their pulpits into amateur recruiting offices and using the doctrines of their master, the Prince of Peace, to sanction the wholesale slaughter of Germans. When it came to the point, the ethics of Christianity were, it seemed, as incapable of practical application as its history and biology of scientific verification. The whole religion as it is taught and preached today thus came to seem a gigantic swindle, a vested economic interest in metaphysical and ethical truth, which continued to be imposed upon the defenceless minds of the young after science had exposed its inaccuracy in point of fact, and the war its hypocrisy in point of ethics, for no other reason than that the salaries and reputations of large bodies of powerful people depended upon its continuing to be thought true.

I am not for a moment saying that I am doing justice to Christianity in this sketch; that the farrago of superstition, hypocrisy, cheating, and vested interest, which is what too often does duty for Christianity today, is all that there is in it or to it. I am merely pointing out that it was in this light that during the period of disillusionment it came to present itself to me and to many others of my generation. Advantage had, or so it seemed to us, been taken of us when we were too young to discover the deception. We had, we felt, been badly "had," and we were bitterly resentful in consequence.

At the same time came a realisation of the interest and wonder of the world around us, and of the chance that we had missed of learning how it worked. While my time was being wasted and my appetite for knowledge blunted by

## WHY WASTE OUR TIME ?

those Collects and Old Testament stories, man's knowledge of life and mind was growing yearly more astonishing; the physical universe revealed to modern science was becoming as fascinating as a fairy tale and as mysterious as a ghost story; there was psycho-analysis, and presently there was relativity. That young and vigorous minds should know something of economics and of the structure of the society in which they are to live is a palpable necessity, if our civilisation is not to crash. Yet these minds in their most receptive stage are still in the name of Christianity being fed upon this diet of legends in which nobody believes, and instructed in codes of morals which the community makes not the slightest attempt to practise. Is it any wonder that, with the memories of their wasted education still fresh, men and women today should be impatient with Christianity, and that those of us who have some acquaintance with science and some perception of the needs and stresses of the times, should refuse to waste any more of their time by devoting to this corpus of myth, legend and dogma which they cannot help but regard as for the most part dead, and as harmful when it is not dead, the careful and scientific study which you require of them?

I have now at last reached the point at which this letter should have begun. That I have been compelled to devote so many pages to dealing with the miscellany of arguments contained in your letter must be laid to your charge, not to mine. Willingly would I have dispensed with this preliminary controversial matter, and proceeded at once with the positive statement of the case which you have allocated to me. But I felt you would have just cause for complaint unless I answered your letter in some detail, and made a serious attempt to deal with the main counts in your indictment.

Yours ever,

CYRIL JOAD.



### III.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
KENT.  
25th April, 1932.

DEAR JOAD,

I.—It is a pleasure to debate with a controversialist who is prepared to concede a point once that point has been established. It was honest of you to admit that your treatment of Christianity was “hopelessly unscientific”—a confession of some importance coming from one who has so freely attacked Christianity in the Press and elsewhere. Your defence of your attitude is interesting rather than convincing.

In the first place, you tell me, you find it difficult to take Christianity seriously because of the “incurable frivolity” of the arguments by which it is defended. Any creed, religious or political, which has commanded, and still commands, the passionate loyalty of men of every grade of intelligence will inevitably be defended by arguments, good, bad and indifferent. You are, I believe, a Communist, but I am sure you would disown many of the frivolous arguments which you may hear on any Sunday in Hyde Park in favour of Communism. A creed must be judged by the best arguments advanced in its favour, not by the worst.

Your attack upon my letter would have been more impressive had you not misconceived the whole drift of the letter in question. We are discussing two questions, first whether Christianity is true, and secondly whether Christianity is harmful. You, for instance, have undertaken to prove that Christianity has been “inimical to the health and happiness of mankind.” It is therefore relevant to remind you, at the outset of our correspondence, that in measuring the effects of Christianity it is only just to take into account our cultural and æsthetic debt to the creed which inspired Chartres and the great Catholic painters. As I never suggested that Christianity was true because Dante was a good poet, I am undismayed by your discovery of that great

Hindu sage, Bhagavadgita, or by your tribute to Asoka. I wonder whether you know Mr. Chesterton's comment on that eminent Buddhist:

"I remember a curious occasion some years ago when certain able journalists on a Socialist paper in Fleet Street suddenly burst into a blazing excitement about King Asoka. Their relations with the prince could not be called intimate; in point of fact he died some thousands of years ago somewhere in the middle of Asia. But it seemed that in him we had lost our only reliable moral guide. Religion was a failure and human life, on the whole, a tragedy; but King Asoka was all right. He was faultlessly just, infinitely merciful, the mirror of the virtues, the prop of the poor. Outsiders were naturally interested in the source of this revelation. And after some discussion it was discovered and mildly pointed out that this discussion of the King's virtues is only found on a few of the King's own official inscriptions. Old Asoka may have been a very nice man, but we have only his word for it that he was as nice as all that."

It would save space in our correspondence if you would quote me correctly. It would have been fatuous for me to suggest that "the doctrines of Catholicism are true because it produced Dante and Fra Angelico." I am quite prepared to defend what I actually said: "It is difficult to understand how a *mere superstition* could take form in so noble a synthesis of spiritual and secular beauty." All I claimed in my first letter was that the faith which had produced this synthesis, and which had satisfied so many demands, spiritual and cultural, should not be condemned unheard. This is a very different contention to maintaining that Christianity is necessarily true because Christianity produced Dante. The thing that really worries me about you moderns is not, as you suggest, your lack of "respect and gratitude" so far as Christianity is concerned, but your lack of knowledge. The last thing I desire is that Christianity should be treated with that chivalrous respect which we accord to venerable institutions that have outlived their day. Christianity thrives on attack, but it is boring to have to deal with uninstructed attacks. I do not demand that you people should devote "years of careful and scientific study to Christianity." All that

I ask is that you should either ignore Christianity or, if you feel impelled to write about it, that you should make an effort to get your facts right. And I welcome this correspondence as evidence of the fact that you, at least, are prepared to take some trouble to discover what can be said for Christianity.

II.—We are in agreement that Christianity has profoundly affected every aspect of human activity in the western world, from which one may deduce as a general conclusion that it should be part of a general education to know something of the history and philosophy of a faith which has had so great an influence on our race. Every philosopher should be something of an historian. He should, for instance, be familiar with the main facts about great movements of thought such as the Reformation. Now the Reformation turned largely on the question of the Mass, and you must therefore forgive my pained surprise that you, a philosopher of some standing, should have made such a schoolboy howler about transubstantiation.

Your defence is that you would be prepared to concede that it is "a sin against culture to ignore Christianity," if Christianity were in fact presented to us as a culture. But why ever should it be? Christianity has affected culture, but it is first and foremost a religion, and must be presented as such. What is your precise grievance? That your parents, who were Christians, tried to bring you up as a Christian? Or that you had to learn the Catechism and the Collects? I, too, had to learn the Collects, but I harbour no grievance on that score. Even a boy can derive some pleasure from the rhythm of Cranmer's prose.

"Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever."

Is it really a hardship to burden one's memory with prose such as this?

## MODERNISTS HAVE QUEERED THE PITCH

Your faith began to falter when you failed to obtain a scholarship for which you had prayed. It did not occur to you, apparently, that if there were, say, five scholarships and fifty prayerful candidates, even an omnipotent deity could not answer more than 10 per cent. of such prayers. If you had ever been led to suppose that you had only to put a prayer in the slot for the machine to deliver the object of your choice, it is, perhaps, no wonder that you ceased to be a Christian.

The War, I gather, completed your disillusionment. I am quite prepared to discuss the attitude of the Churches to the War in another letter; for the moment I will content myself with registering a protest against your assumption that Quakers alone correctly interpret the mind of Christ on the subject of War.

III.—Your second line of defence is that it is impossible to take Christianity seriously because Christianity is not one body of doctrine but “a complex of heterogeneous and frequently contradictory beliefs and practices.” I have some sympathy with this complaint, for the Modernists have queered the pitch by allocating to themselves the title of “Christian” to which they have no claim.

Your letter shows up the fatuity of attempting to attract the modern mind by sacrificing the supernatural. Our modernists are so busy trying to reconcile Christianity with the latest fad and fashion that they do not pause to note the contemptuous rejection of their compromise, which is all the thanks they deserve and receive from moderns like you. I am confident that you yourself have far more sympathy with the Pope than with Bishop Barnes.

The more extreme forms of Modernism, which deny the supernatural and the Resurrection, attract more attention than they should, thanks to the publicity given to Modernism by the Press. The Press are deceived by the name; they tend to assume that Modernism means Christianity up-to-date. They have yet to discover that the only really modern movement in our religion is the return to dogma and the supernatural. It is only in comparatively recent times that a man who described himself as a Christian would dare to deny the godhead of Christ or the Resurrection.

The essence of Christianity is not, as you suggest, certain geological or astronomical theories, but the belief that Jesus Christ is God and that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. It is those beliefs which I propose to defend in these letters. I do not agree that the main beliefs of the different churches are contradictory. The mediæval Catholic and modern revivalists, such as the Salvation Army, agree so far as the central doctrines of Christianity are concerned. And as for John XXIII and St. Francis, the former was a bad Catholic and the latter was a good Catholic, but sinner and saint both agreed in whole-heartedly accepting the Catholic faith.

I am left unmoved by your discovery that Christians differ, have differed and will continue to differ on points of biblical exegesis. Very few of these differences are modern, though you appear to suppose that Christians continued to accept with untroubled faith the literal accuracy of the Bible until the Victorian scientists opened their attack; whereupon, you would have us believe, panic broke out in the ranks of the Church. Bishops rushed to their Bibles to discover whether they could reconcile geology with Genesis, and, on discovering that they could not, began to jettison one doctrine of the Christian faith after another. The fact is, of course, that from the earliest days it was recognised that the Bible consisted mainly of history, but also partly of poetry, and the question of whether certain difficult passages should be interpreted as history or as poetry has been debated among Christians from the earliest times.

If you really suppose that Christianity is disproved because we are told that Christ descended into Hell, modern science having proved that hell is not in the centre of the earth, I can only refer you once again to St. Thomas's remark on the use of metaphor and allegory in the Bible.

You ask me what common authority is recognised by Christians, and you add: "To this question I was in my innocence about to suggest the Bible." There may be Christians, such as the American Fundamentalists, who believe in the literal accuracy of the Bible, and who make no attempt to justify this belief by reason, but we are, I take it, in this correspondence discussing the reasoned grounds on which intelligent people accept Christianity, not the emo-

## THE CLASSIC ARGUMENT FOR CHRISTIANITY

tional reactions of pious "will-to-believers." Obviously if I replied that I believed everything in the Bible, and that I believed by faith that the Bible was infallible, there would be no point in continuing this correspondence.

IV.—I am afraid this letter will be terribly long, but it is largely your fault. It is impossible to argue about Christianity with a man who misconceives the basis of Christian apologetics. It is essential to clear the ground by removing this misconception, and you must therefore forgive me for outlining the classic argument on which the Christian relies.

Whether Christianity is reasonable is, I agree, a matter of opinion, but whether the Christian theologian appeals to reason is a question of fact. The argument may be summarised as follows: The existence of God, as I hope to show in a later letter, can be proved by pure reason. Natural Theology is the science of deducing by reason those attributes of God which can be proved without recourse to revelation. Other facts about God, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, cannot be proved by reason, and depend on revelation. Our next task must therefore be to discover whether God has revealed Himself to man and to attempt to test, once again by pure reason, the credentials of any alleged revelation.

We now approach the Bible, and approach it in the same spirit as that in which we should approach any other human document. We do not believe in the Bible merely because it is the Bible, but because we are convinced of its veracity by rational inferences similar in kind to those which convince us of other historical facts. We do not, for instance, accept the fact that Christ rose from the dead merely because we find the Resurrection recorded in the Gospels; we accept the Resurrection because, of all theories which have been put forward to explain the origin of Christianity, the only theory which fits all the facts is the theory that Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be God and proved his claim by rising from the dead. Thus far Catholics and Protestants are in agreement; they do not appeal either to faith, or to humility, or to authority, or to an infallible Bible in their attempt to prove the central doctrine of Christianity.

The Roman Catholic, then, claims to prove from he

Bible, which he is still treating as a purely human document, that Christ intended to found an infallible Church. Where, then, is this Church? The Roman Catholic Church alone possesses, so the Catholic believes, all the "notes" which enable us to distinguish between the Church which Christ founded and its heretical rivals.

The Catholic claims to have proved by pure reason that Christ was God, that Christ founded an infallible Church, and that the Roman Catholic Church is the church in question. Having travelled thus far by reason unaided by authority, it is not irrational to trust the authority, whose credentials have been proved by reason, to interpret difficult passages in the Bible. "The approach to the Church is," as Father Hugh Pope remarks, "through faith in the Bible as a purely human narrative," but once we have proved that the Church is infallible we may reasonably accept its teaching on the inspiration of Scripture.

The Protestant reserves considerably more right of private judgment in his interpretation of the Bible, but he agrees with the Catholic in asserting that the Resurrection of Christ may be proved by reasoning similar to that which enables us to prove that Julius Cæsar landed in Great Britain. Incidentally, I have now answered your question as to the principle which permits Christians to reject the historical accuracy of Genesis and to discriminate between the story of Creation in Genesis and the Resurrection. If we accept the creation story in Genesis, we accept it on the authority of the Church, which has decided that Genesis was inspired, and which has also laid down in what sense Genesis is history and in what sense it is to be regarded as allegorical. But we do not accept the Resurrection on the authority of the Church; we accept it on the authority of human evidence at least as impressive as the evidence for many of the beliefs which you, for one, never question.

V.—I must now devote some space to your reply to my challenge to name a single doctrine *de fide* for Roman Catholics which is at variance with the proven results of scientific research. You answer, as I fully expected, by naming the doctrine of fixed types.

You would be surprised to learn that the Roman Catholic

accepts as a "probable hypothesis" the theory of evolution as applied to animals lower than man.

So far as man is concerned, you will find the whole question of his origin discussed in a recent work by a Roman Catholic priest, *Evolution and Theology*.<sup>1</sup> The author is a professor at Louvain, and his book received the *imprimatur* of the Roman Catholic Censor. The author sums up the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards the alleged simian origin of man as follows:

"The Church says:

1. There is nothing in this notion intrinsically repugnant either to the Scriptures or to Faith;

2. She will not affirm it, even supposing it were true, because it is not her business to make such affirmations;

3. Since she has not yet, in her practical judgment, obtained proofs from science of a sufficiently high order of moral certitude, she will not permit anyone to assert it as a fact while speaking in her name;

4. When and if it receives physical proof as certain as (let us say) that enjoyed by the theory of gravitation when it left the hands of Newton and Kepler, it will no doubt be included in the regular programme of her scholastic establishments;

5. Taking it as a 'possible hypothesis' (as derivative creation applied to animals lower than man is taken for a 'probable hypothesis'), Catholics may freely work towards its establishment, by research and discussion;

6. If anyone chooses to make it a purely personal belief, he may."

It is none of my business to defend the Roman Catholic Church, but if Rome, the most conservative of all Christian churches, can be acquitted on the charge of teaching doctrines at variance with science, there is some hope that you will be persuaded to cease referring to this purely imaginary conflict between Christianity and science. For what holds good of Rome in this respect must, *a fortiori*, hold good of other churches.

You reply that St. Thomas Aquinas believed in fixed types and that Mr. Belloc has recently expressed his belief in fixed

<sup>1</sup> By the Rev. E. C. Messinger, Ph.D.



types, in which, by the way, you do Mr. Belloc less than justice. But we are concerned not with the views of St. Thomas, but with the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

The beliefs held by Roman Catholics may be divided into different categories.

The central category represents the doctrines which have been authoritatively defined by General Councils or by the Pope speaking *ex cathedra*, doctrines which cannot be denied by a Catholic under pain of heresy.

The next category represents doctrines which, without being *de fide*, are labelled "certain" in manuals of Catholic theology, and the contrary of which no priest would dream of teaching. There is no doubt, for instance, that if the Catholic teaching on birth control were seriously challenged, the Pope would formally reassert it in an *ex cathedra* pronouncement.

The next category consists of doctrines which are not *de fide*, and which are not labelled "certain," but which it would none the less be "temerarious" to question.

The next category represents doctrines which the Church does not consider to be proved or disproved, and which Catholics are therefore free to hold but not free to teach—*e.g.*, the simian origin of man.

The next category represents those doctrines which Catholics are free both to hold and to teach. This group includes almost all scientific questions from relativity to the evolution of animals lower than man.

In order to substantiate your charge that Roman Catholics select for defence those dogmas "which are immune from attacks based on the textual criticism of scientific knowledge of the moment," you must show that beliefs which once belonged to the two central categories have now been relegated to an outer circle.

The Roman Catholic Church will never budge an inch from doctrines which have been defined as *de fide* and from the doctrines labelled "certain," but Roman Catholic theologians have held, and will continue to hold, the most diverse views on the scientific questions of the day. You do not prove the reality of the conflict between science and religion by

quoting an archbishop who believes, or who disbelieves, in evolution, any more than you can prove that the Roman Catholic Church has erred because many Roman Catholics still accept Darwin's curious attempts to explain the evolutionary process by the sole agency of Natural Selection. The Catholic Church is usually accused of imposing too rigid a discipline in matters of doctrine; your complaint would seem to be that Roman Catholic theologians have been left free to hold all manner of views on geology and astronomy. And why ever not? There is an old saying that it is the duty of the Church to teach men how to go to heaven, and that it is none of the Church's business to teach men how the heavens go.

VI.—Now let me recapitulate this part of my argument before tackling your theology. You have admitted that your treatment of Christianity is unscientific, and you have defended this treatment on the grounds that Christianity is defended by frivolous arguments (which is a question for the reader of this book to decide), that Christianity is a heterogeneous muddle of beliefs (to which I have replied that there is a wide measure of agreement among Christians on the central doctrines), that you were bored with your religious upbringing, that you did not get the scholarship for which you prayed, that the churches are hypocritical because they differ from you in their attitude to war, and finally that Christianity is only maintained because the salaries of large bodies of powerful people depend on its continuing to be thought true.

Let us suppose that you were debating with a man who had produced a violent attack on some Greek philosopher, and that you had convicted him of unscientific treatment of the subject by proving that he had misinterpreted the central doctrines of, say, Plato, misquoted and misrepresented Aristotle, and that he was very ignorant of the main currents of Greek philosophy.

What would be the effect on your mind if he replied, "Oh yes, I admit that I don't know much about Greek philosophy and that my attitude towards it is unscientific, but really Greek philosophers differed so much that it is impossible to find any common ground of agreement among them; besides,

A. L. TO C. E. M. J.

I had to learn a lot of Greek poetry when I was a boy which bored me . . . and a list of names and dates of Greek history . . . the stories of Greek mythology struck me as disreputable, and I was shocked by the immoral stories told about the Greek gods. I came to the conclusion that all this boosting of the Greeks was maintained for no other reason than the fact that the salaries of schoolmasters and dons depended on the continuance of this cult for Greek philosophy”?

No analogy is perfect, but there is perhaps more in this parallel than you would be disposed to admit.

Yours ever,

ARNOLD LUNN.

#### IV.

4, EAST HEATH ROAD,  
N.W. 3.  
*May 1st.*

DEAR LUNN,

It is with the utmost difficulty that I restrain myself from replying to your letter. Believe me, I itch to reply, but I am resolved to begin my job of exegesis or, less politely, to be "up and at" Christianity, and my answer must keep. It will, I assure you, lose nothing in the keeping.

I agree that this book should consist of two parts, and that the first should contain a statement by me of the reasons why I am not a Christian.

I shall divide this statement into four sections. In the first, I shall urge that Christianity is not true, since it implies an untenable theory of the universe; in the second, that we should be heartily thankful that it is not, since the view of the deity that its truth would entail is intolerable. In the third, I shall argue that Christianity has been and to the extent to which it has influence still is, inimical to the health and happiness of mankind; in the fourth, that it has obstructed and still obstructs the progress of mankind.

Although I shall begin at the beginning with God's creation of the world, I shall make no apology for traversing centuries by leaps and bounds at the risk of sacrificing the dignity of morals, metaphysics and history to the necessity of coming to the point as soon as possible.

I am arguing first, then, that Christianity is untrue because, and in so far as, it involves an untenable view of the universe. As the argument will inevitably occupy the whole of this letter, I shall leave to my next letter the demonstration of the tremendous, the highly gratifying importance of the fact that it is untrue.

For the sake of brevity I shall concentrate on one question only, that of the nature of pain and evil. Christianity holds, in so far as it can be regarded as a single body of teaching which holds anything at all, that the world is the creation of

a Being who, possessing all good and desirable qualities, possesses pre-eminently those of omnipotence, benevolence and omniscience. It holds, of course, a great many other things as well with regard to the nature and attributes of this Being, His relation to other members of the Trinity and the motives with which He undertook paternity; but these attributes of omnipotence, benevolence and omniscience are enough for my present purpose.

For this hypothesis the existence of pain and evil constitutes, it is notorious, a problem of considerable difficulty. Attempts by the score have been made to solve this problem—indeed, practically every Christian sect prides itself on its unique and uniquely satisfying solution—but none of them is in my view in the least satisfactory. Remembering your *penchant* for the methods of the Schoolmen, I will give my reasons for this opinion in the form of a number of logical propositions. If these reasons are sound, then the Christian conception of the Deity, and of the origin, nature and purpose of the world which is based upon it, will be untenable.

I. Pain and Evil are either real or unreal.

A. Let us suppose first that they are real. God created the world; therefore He is logically and temporally prior to it. God is all good; therefore at one time only that which was good existed. Therefore by creating the world God deliberately caused pain and evil to come into existence. But the deliberate causation of pain and evil is not the mark of a good being.

B. Many Christians, however, hold that pain and evil are unreal. It is not quite clear what is meant by the word “unreal.” Possible interpretations are (i) that pain and evil only *appear* to be real to our limited and partial intelligences, or to our morally clouded outlook; or (ii) that in pertaining solely to this world, which is a temporary and therefore not quite real habitation of the spirit, they are themselves infected with its semi-reality. If we live in the manner which priests enjoin and of which God is said to approve, we shall, presumably, go in the long run to heaven, where pain and evil are unknown, and remain there permanently. If we assume that residence in heaven will ultimately be the fate of all living beings, dismiss the existence of hell as a morbid

invention of sadistic, priestly imaginations, and waive the difficulty of a heaven for tape-worms and bacteria, we may be entitled to suppose that ultimately this world with its pain and evil will pass away and that there will be only heaven with its happiness and bliss. In this sense, then, the sense in which they are temporary only, pain and evil might be considered to be unreal. But, whatever the precise sense may be in which their unreality is affirmed, it cannot, I think, be doubted that most Christians, holding that the universe is good at bottom, do in fact regard them as unreal in some sense in which goodness and happiness are real.

Now there is no doubt that we *think* that we suffer and *think* men do us evil. We *think*, therefore, that pain and evil are real, when on this supposition in fact they are not so. Now this error we make as to the nature of pain and evil must be a real one. If it were an unreal error, the view that pain and evil are real would not *really* be false, and pain and evil would be real. Therefore the error must be real in a sense in which pain and evil are not. The universe, therefore, on this assumption contains real error. Now God is all truth; therefore there was a time when the universe was without error. Thus God wittingly created error, or, rather, He wittingly created beings who, He knew, would introduce error into a universe of truth. Also God deceives human beings as to the real nature of pain and evil, causing us to think real what is in fact not so.

The creation of error, or the creation of beings who are known to be going to create error, is not the mark of a Being who is all good, while an omnipotent Being can have no need to deceive.

II. One of the commonest modes of escape from these dilemmas is to assert that pain and evil were not in fact created by God Who is in no way responsible for them, but are due to the wickedness of man. God in the plenitude of His goodness gave man the precious gift of free-will in order that, choosing for himself, he might realise a good which is all the greater because it has been freely achieved after a struggle against evil. Sojourn in this world, it is commonly said, is to be regarded as a period of discipline and training imposed upon sinful man in order that he may become

worthy of perfection. Discipline and training would be inefficacious if the choices of the trainee were determined in the sense that he was only able to choose good, or because there was only good for him to choose. Therefore it is essential that man should enjoy freedom of choice and that it should be possible for him to choose evil. Now man has, in fact, used his freedom to do evil, and pain is the result of evil. Hence he suffers pain because of his own misguided choices.

To this curious doctrine there are the following objections:

(a) It implies that the degree of moral virtue achievable by man is greater than possible to God, since we cannot suppose that the latter's goodness is, like man's, achieved by resisting temptation and rejecting evil. God, unlike man, does good because He must.

(b) It does not achieve the desired result of absolving God from responsibility for the evil in the world, because (i) in asserting that man can and does choose evil, it presupposes that the seeds of wickedness already existed in man. Obviously one could not choose evil, if one was completely good. Therefore man must be supposed to be initially wicked, in that, on his first appearance in the world, he already possesses the potentiality for making bad choices, this wickedness of his being *prior to and not the result of* his bad choosing. Hence, God created man with the seeds of wickedness already in his heart. Hence, the responsibility for the beginnings of pain and evil comes back to God. (ii) God is omniscient. Therefore He must have known how men would use His gift of free-will; therefore He must have known that man would use it to do evil and to cause pain. Nevertheless God insisted on endowing man with this gift, although He knew the use that man would make of it. Therefore God deliberately permitted, indeed He connived at, the introduction of pain and evil into a world which knew them not.

(c) God is omniscient; therefore He knows what is going to happen. God cannot make mistakes; therefore, what He knows to be going to happen, must happen; therefore man's freedom is an illusion, since the future is already determined by God's knowledge of it. In the circumstances it is, to say the least of it, a little disingenuous of God to deplore man's

## HOW COULD GOD CREATE ?

wickedness when man had no choice but to perform it, and worse than disingenuous to punish man for doing that which, in advance of man's creation, God must have known that he would do.

III. If God created the world, He cannot be perfect. The creation of anything implies the occurrence of change, change in, among other things, the creator. God, in fact, is conceived first as wishing to create, then as having fulfilled His wish. Change in a person is either for the better or for the worse. If God changed for the better as a result of creating, He cannot have been perfect to begin with ; if He deliberately changed for the worse, He cannot have been good.

Let me put the point in a rather different way. God could not have created, unless He had a motive to do so. A motive to action implies desire for that for the sake of which the action is undertaken. God, then, desired something. You cannot desire what you have ; therefore God lacked something. Now this desire was either for what was good or for what was bad : if it was for what was good, God cannot have been perfect, for there must have been some good—namely, that which God desired—which He lacked. If the desire was for what was bad, God cannot have been good, or he would not have entertained such a desire. (On reflection I may be wrong in thinking that God cannot desire what is bad, because Christianity appears to hold that He can love it. This world is admittedly bad ; at least, most of it is. Yet Christians are asked to believe that "God so loved the world that He sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ," to save it. I suppose that God must have loved it, *in spite of its being bad*. Still it is all very difficult. . . .)

The upshot of these arguments is that a perfect Being can feel neither need nor want. He can want neither that which is good nor that which is bad. Therefore, He has no motive for action and cannot feel the need to create.

IV. Finally, the whole process envisaged in the Christian cosmology is pointless. It begins with God ; that is, it begins with absolute perfection. It envisages as proceeding from God the world which contains either real pain and evil or, as I have shown, real error. Let us suppose that in this world all ultimately goes for the best, that we waive the doubts sug-



gested above as to the future of tapeworms and bacteria, waive the permanence of hell in which apparently your recent opponent Father Ronald Knox believes, and accept the view that all living things ultimately go to heaven. What or where heaven is, is not clear; but we will suppose that "going to heaven," whatever else it may mean, involves becoming perfect even as God is perfect, or, at least, becoming nearly perfect. The end of the process is, then, absolute perfection; but so also was the beginning. What, then, can be the point of a process which, starting with perfection and involving pain and evil (or error) by the way, culminates in an end which is identical with its beginning?

I do not expect you to answer these questions, for I believe them to be unanswerable. The ordinary answer of the Christian apologist is that these are matters too high (or deep—either epithet is used indifferently) for our understanding, and that we must accordingly not try to reason about them, but must approach them in humility and faith. The use of the word humility is, I take it, an implied snub to reason, which, when it arrives at conclusions distasteful to Christians or shows why their own conclusions are inadmissible, is stigmatised as presumptuous.

Now this answer may be all very well in its way, but for our present purpose it has two disadvantages.

In the first place, it carries no weight with those who are not already and on other grounds convinced of the truth of Christianity. If one is on other grounds convinced, or if one regards those parts of the Christian view of the universe which one understands as antecedently probable, or even as desirable, then one will naturally be inclined to be credulous and sympathetic in regard to those parts which one does not. But if not, not. I, as you know, am not convinced, and regarding Christianity as neither beautiful nor useful, am impervious to the answer.

In the second place, whether it is true or false, it puts an end to controversy. Controversy can only be conducted on a plane common to both parties—that is, on the plane of reasoning. There may be things—I think there are—which we know without being able to support our knowledge by reasoning, or even to give a reasonable account of that which we know, but

NO MYSTERIES, PLEASE !

such knowledge cannot be communicated to those who do not already possess it. A conviction of the existence of God based on other than rational grounds is as private and personal a thing as the toothache ; it is also as incommunicable. You can convince me that you have it—I believe, indeed, that you have—but no amount of such asseveration can communicate it to me, or convince me that your conviction is justified.

Therefore, I submit, the answer must in general be ruled out of this correspondence. It is a trump card which you may have up your sleeve, but which I beg you to keep there. On reflection, though, I will let you bring it out once, and once only ; for I have much too high an opinion of your ability as a controversialist to think that you will need to use it more often. We will play, then, if you please, with this one exception in no trumps hands and with all our cards on the table.

Yours ever,

CYRIL JOAD.

V.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
KENT.

*May 8th,*

DEAR JOAD,

I am surprised that you should think that there is any danger of my appealing to a private revelation of my own whenever I get into difficulties. "I do not expect you to answer these questions," you write, "for I believe them to be unanswerable," and you proceed to suggest that I shall defend my conviction that God exists on other than rational grounds. The Christian appeals, you imply, not to reason, but to "faith and humility," and bases his belief in God "on other than rational grounds."

I hasten to assure you that the Christian with whom you are corresponding is entirely without "faith" in the technical sense of that term. I ceased to be a Christian at the age of seventeen. I then devoted a good deal of time to Huxley, Haeckel, Bradlaugh and other champions of agnosticism, but before long I began to suspect the rationalism of the rationalists. Being sceptical by temperament, I was puzzled to explain the simple faith of Victorian scientists in the incurable regularity of the universe. I could find no evidence for the great Victorian dogma, "Miracles do not occur." I was puzzled by the lack of scientific curiosity displayed by Huxley when asked to investigate the odd happenings alleged to have occurred in the presence of the medium Home. I was prepared to reject the accumulated evidence for the supernatural if this evidence could be proved to be unsatisfactory, but I was not prepared to reject it merely because it conflicted with the view of the universe current in scientific circles.

I could not discover any reason for the tone of moral rectitude which ran through the publications of the Rationalist Press Association. If determinism, which is the accepted creed of most scientists, is true, morality is meaningless; it

is as absurd to talk about an immoral man as about an immoral volcano. The sins of a Nero and the eruptions of a Vesuvius are alike the inevitable result of a predetermined force. Moral indignation cannot be rationally justified by the determinists, and yet there is more moral indignation to the square inch of the *Freethinker* than to the square foot of the *Church Times*.

I lost confidence in the Rationalists because I have no use for blind unquestioning faith. I was perturbed by their childlike faith in the dogmas which they made no attempt to prove, by their faith in the inevitability of progress, in the magic efficacy of evolution, in the possibility of reconciling ethics with determinism and in the unchallenged supremacy of Natural Law.

It was my own flight from faith which precipitated my return to Christianity. Here was a creed, as I discovered when I began to re-examine it, which appealed in the first instance not to faith but to reason. Here was a code which, unlike the code of the high-minded materialist, had a rational relation to the creed on which it was based. I investigated the case for the existence of God and for the resurrection of Jesus Christ and became convinced by a purely intellectual process of the central truths of Christianity. My convictions about Christianity are due to natural certitude, to the same kind of certitude which a jurymen feels when he brings in a verdict of "guilty" in a murder trial. And just as the jurymen may have occasional qualms after recording his verdict, so I have occasional doubts. Now Faith, which is a gift of God, is a supernatural certitude excluding doubt. My beliefs are uninspired by faith and owe nothing to religious experience, for I have never had any religious experience. You and I are in much the same position. We are both blind, but I have satisfied myself by reason, as I hope to satisfy you by pure reason, that colour exists.

And now for your attack on orthodox theology.

I note with pleasure your reverent typography (capitals used for personal pronouns, such as "He" or "Him" when you refer to God); pleasure, because I should be distressed to feel that you were left defenceless on the Judgment Day when the irreverence of your letter, so far as the substance

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is concerned, forms part of the indictment to which you will listen with growing alarm on that fateful occasion. I shall, however, not follow your example, for I agree with my late sparring partner, Father Knox, that capitalising the pronouns often throws emphasis on the wrong word. Neither the Authorised nor the Douay versions of the Bible nor the Anglican Prayer Book capitalise the personal pronoun.

My first difficulty is to discover whether you reject the idea of God, or merely the Christian doctrine of God. I have just been reading your book, *The Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science*, which I both enjoyed and admired. Time and again your arguments in that book lead irresistibly to a belief in God; nowhere do you assert your disbelief in God, and there are many passages consistent with belief in a deity. Nor do I think that I am doing you an injustice if I suggest that you find in the witness of the mystics overwhelming evidence for the supernatural. True, you shrink from using the word "supernatural," but this is only a symptom of that logophobia from which modern writers suffer. Words such as "God" and the "supernatural" frighten them; it is unfashionable to profess belief in the supernatural, so we are constrained to talk about "value" and to relegate to the "order of values" absolute truth and absolute beauty. I am inclined to think that if you would face up to the greatest of all problems—how did everything start?—your writing would gain in clearness and you would avoid that metaphorical escape from thought which results in personifying "life," and in attributing to life creative powers without explaining whence those creative powers came.

Before I deal with your criticisms of Christian theology, I must once again correct your misconception of Christian doctrine. It is untrue to say that "many Christians hold that pain and evil are unreal." You must not attribute to Christianity the errors of the Eddyites, even if they do call themselves Christian Scientists. Christian Science is neither Christian nor scientific. No Christian holds that "residence in heaven will ultimately be the fate of all living beings." It is therefore unnecessary to "waive the difficulty of a heaven for tapeworms and bacteria," seeing that this difficulty exists

in your imagination alone. Christian theology does *not* include doctrines concerning "the motives with which God undertook paternity," perhaps because the Athanasian Creed lays it down that the three persons of the Trinity are "co-eternal together and co-equal."

What is your authority for asserting that "every Christian sect prides itself on its unique and uniquely satisfying solution to the problem of evil"? Churches differ on many points, but there is no specifically Roman solution of this problem as opposed to an Anglican solution, a Methodist solution, or a Greek Orthodox solution. Moreover, I have yet to meet the theologian who boasts that he has discovered a completely satisfying solution to this, the greatest of all problems. So much by way of preface.

It is good of you to humour my weakness for the Schoolmen by stating your case "in a number of logical propositions," but I hope that your respect for logic is not solely inspired by controversial courtesy. I rather doubt, however, if St. Thomas, after reading your propositions, would be anxious to claim you as a convert to his method.

Your main argument seems to imply that Christian theology is absurd because Christian theologians have not succeeded in reconciling the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and all-good God with the existence of evil.

Is God knowable? It is important not to belittle or to exaggerate the power of human reason. The human mind is finite, but within certain limits it is a powerful instrument, sufficiently accurate to prove that God exists and that God has revealed himself to mankind through Christ. The human mind is, however, not sufficiently powerful to comprehend the mind of the infinite.

I am not in the least disturbed by the fact that divine science, like natural science, brings us face to face with apparently insoluble contradictions. "The scientific worker," as Lord Rayleigh remarked in his presidential address to the British Association, "knows in his heart that underneath the theories which he constructs there lie contradictions which he cannot reconcile." The moment that man begins to think out the nature of ultimate reality he inevitably enters the realm in which contradiction and mystery abound. In your



last book you yourself insist that mystery is of the essence of deity. "God," you write, "if he is such as we can worship, must be at once mysterious and aloof. He loses in holiness as he gains in accessibility. The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious."

I quote this passage not because I agree with it in detail, but because it is evidence that you recognise that a deity can never be wholly known. And I might add that the questions with which you pose me are certainly no more difficult to answer than the numbered questions about your idea of "Life" which I put to you in my first letter. None of the difficulties you raise are, as you would be the first to admit, new. They have all been raised and answered hundreds of times. Not even a Dominican disciple of St. Thomas would pretend that all the answers are completely satisfactory.

In my correspondence with Father Knox, I made many of the points which you now make, among others the difficulty of explaining why an infinitely perfect deity should ever have felt the urge to create: the *raison d'être* of creation is to add something of value, and it is impossible to add anything of value to the infinitely perfect. Again, I devoted a large part of one chapter to the age-old difficulty of free-will and omniscience. I do not suppose that you will be satisfied by Father Knox's replies, but at least they may succeed in convincing you that the Christian is not necessarily bound to admit that free will is inconsistent with omniscience, nor need a Christian necessarily believe that God knows every detail of the future. Bishop Gore was no Modernist, and yet he was prepared to concede that God might permit man to do things which God himself had not foreseen.

I expect you are familiar with the views of William James and Schiller, both of whom deny the omnipotence and omniscience of God. Their arguments were adopted by, among others, the late Mr. Studdert-Kennedy and were, incidentally, responsible for a very queer book by Mr. H. G. Wells. I am rather inclined to agree with Father Knox that such views, in their more extreme Studdert-Kennedy form, are subversive of the whole basis of theism, but I mention them merely by way of convincing you that Christians are very much alive to the difficulties which you raise and that some

modification of God's omnipotence and omniscience is one suggested solution.

You mention with surprise that my late opponent, Father Knox, "apparently believes" ("apparently" is a characteristic touch) "in the permanence of hell." But surely you must know that belief in eternal punishment is *de fide* for a Roman Catholic. The doctrine of hell is not, as you suggest, "a morbid invention of sadistic priestly imagination"; it is imbedded in the teaching of Christ, which is, perhaps, the reason why the Church refuses to make any concession on this point to modern susceptibilities.

The problem of evil is admittedly a problem for which there is no completely satisfactory explanation, but you do not make matters any easier by assuming that pain and evil are interchangeable terms. I quote the following from your pamphlet, *What Fighting Means* (published by the No More War Movement):

"According to most novelists and all moralists the worst evil in the world that can happen to females is that they should lose their honour. This is simply not true. Far worse than losing your honour is to be tied up naked to a post and jogged at nicely calculated intervals in carefully chosen parts with the end of a red-hot poker. I am convinced that any female would prefer to lose her honour a hundred times over, if this is not a contradiction in terms, provided only the process of stimulation with a poker should stop. Similarly with male honour. . . .

And so I will content myself with my previous example, and defy any male, however brave, after five minutes' treatment with the poker, not to choose any evil that I could name that was not a physical evil, in preference to a continuance of this treatment."

What is the point of making statements that can be refuted without the least difficulty? Surely you must know that men and women by the thousand have preferred the most excruciating torture to dishonour?

There is no necessary identity between pain and evil, and therefore pain need not necessarily exclude radiant happiness. It was not, as you probably know, the courage of the early Christians so much as their happiness which impressed the

crowds in the amphitheatre. It was no new thing to see men endure torture without flinching, but to see young girls laughing in the flames as though they thoroughly enjoyed the joke of being roasted alive was something rather surprising. Again, it cannot have escaped so close a student of mysticism as yourself that many of the saints have shown the most amazing love of suffering. Catholics are taught to "offer up" pain which they may be suffering on behalf of someone or some cause in which they are interested—a childish device, you will think, but a device which somehow seems to satisfy the test of the pragmatist. It works. In every hospital you will find people who are enduring appalling pain and who are yet radiantly happy. It is for you who consider, falsely, that physical pain is the greatest of all evils, to explain this fact.

In a very small way I verified for myself the fact that happiness is not the same thing as pleasure. Few people dislike pain more intensely than I do. I cannot conceive myself enduring torture for more than one moment, but even so I do not entirely share your view about the identity of pain and evil. Many years ago I smashed myself up mountaineering, and had every reason to suppose that I should never be able to climb again. When at last I managed to drag myself up a big peak I was violently sick with pain on reaching the summit, but those few moments when I lay prostrate on the crest of the Dent Blanche were moments of intense exalted happiness.

And perhaps the analogy of mountaineering helps to suggest if not a solution, at least a clue to this problem of evil. The days on which a mountaineer looks back with keenest pleasure are not the days when the sun shone on warm, dry rocks, days of effortless victory, but the long hours of struggle with storm and with ice-glazed slabs. Hunger and weariness, cold and pain, are an integral part of mountaineering without which this great sport would lose its savour. Surely the same is true of life itself. Once you admit that it is the contrast with struggle and even failure which alone gives its savour to life, and that an effortless victory is a barren victory, you have gone a long way towards the question of why God permits evil. It may be difficult to reconcile the existence of

## THE ECONOMY OF REVELATION

evil with the existence of an omnipotent deity, but it is impossible to conceive of an infinitely perfect universe for the good reason that an infinitely perfect universe would be infinitely tedious. You will not deny that it would be even more difficult for a theologian to reconcile the contradictory attributes of infinite tedium and infinite perfection than to explain the existence of evil in a universe governed by an omnipotent God.

There is one point which I must make in conclusion in order to save you wasting both time and paper on a false scent. You have, I think, missed the radical distinction between Christianity and any system of philosophy, such as Plato's. Every philosopher attempts to provide a satisfying explanation of the universe. Christianity, on the other hand, is only a partial revelation of God, a revelation which does not pretend to do more than define a few great facts about God, in particular his intentions with regard to man and of man's duty to God. You write as if Christianity was mainly an attempt to answer the riddle of the universe, and as if Christianity has failed because it cannot solve a series of conundrums about the nature of God. But the object of the Christian revelation is not so much to satisfy intellectual curiosity as to guide men to heaven. Once you have grasped this fact you will no longer be scandalised by the economy of revelation which has left unsolved many theological problems. If the phagocytes which inhabit your body are intelligent, they will have discovered that the universe in which they live is governed by an intelligent being, but it would be no disproof of the existence of the book of Joad, if a joadistic phagocyte were to prove that there were many inconsistencies in the philosophy of Joadians.

Yours ever,  
ARNOLD LUNN.

## VI.

4, EAST HEATH ROAD,  
N.W. 3.  
May 13th, 1932.

MY DEAR LUNN,

I.—You must forgive me for not taking up the points in your last two letters as they deserve. I have to get on with my job of saying why I am not a Christian, and must resolutely refuse to be seduced in this letter, as I was in my first, by the siren notes of an opponent's voice raised in controversy. Yours are particularly attractive, and throughout this letter there will be a sound of creaking, as I strain against the ropes which bind me to the mast of exegesis and prevent me from getting at you. But I must be firm, and reserve my answering fire for the second half when I promise to unstop my ears.

Permit me, however, to note in passing:

(1) That you would be well advised to economise your own ammunition. So many of your positive reasons for Christianity are straying into this half, that you will be hard put to it to find any fresh ones in the next.

(2) That I agree with what you say about determinism. If it is true, morality loses its meaning. I used to be at a loss to explain the formidably moral lives of many Rationalist determinists—as strait-laced a lot as ever sprang from the loins of Calvin himself. Now, however, I see that they must, on their view, be regarded as determined to act *as if* determinism was untrue and morality significant, just as they are determined to think determinism true, when it isn't. I commend this to you as a logical explanation of how one can be a good man on a false doctrine, and morally indignant with sinners who, if one is right, have no choice but to sin.

(3) That you must not at present expect me to follow you into the niceties of Catholic doctrine, with its various circles of ever-deepening dogmatism. If I did, I should be tripped up by subtleties which no reasonable man can be

expected to understand, and brow-beaten with authorities of whom no busy man can be expected to have heard.

You accuse me of wilful ignorance? Then you are pot to my kettle, for what should I in that event have to say of the ignorance of one who, presuming to write about religious matters, believes that the Bhagavadgita was a Hindu sage? "The Bhagavadgita, my dear Lunn," I should point out, "is not a man but a book, in point of fact a very famous book; it is the Indian Bible, or rather the New Testament of the Indian Bible." If you then proceeded to tell me that you have no call to know about Hinduism, since you do not presume to write about it, that, in short, Christianity is enough for you, I should answer that from your point of view this is, perhaps, an adequate defence, but that it is just because it would be adequate that your point of view stands condemned. "For it is just this parochialism of you Christians," I should go on, "that I find so unreasonable. As a reasonable man you must admit that the fact of your being a Christian and not a Hindu is mere accident, a topographical accident. If you had been born in a bedroom a few thousand miles to the eastward, you would," I should point out, "have adopted one of the Hindu religions as surely as you have now adopted Christianity."

"Now you are," I should proceed, "a man interested in religions; you want to know whether this visible world around us is the only world, or whether there is a spiritual one which underlies it. Is it not a little unreasonable to confine your investigation of the question to one set of answers, those, namely, offered by a particular section of mankind, a section, moreover, of comparative neophytes in religious matters, and completely to ignore the answers offered by the rest? Is it not more unreasonable still to allow the particular set of answers which alone engages your attention and upon which you rely for spiritual satisfaction and for your hope of spiritual truth to be determined for you by an event over which you had no control, a topographical accident of birth?"

These things, no doubt, and more should I say to you, scolding you, if you were to make that accusation of ignorance; but as you have not made it yet, consider that they lie in wait for you, to be said when you do.

But to return to the niceties of Catholic belief, if you are trying to persuade me that the doctrine of evolution does not contradict the account of creation given in the early chapters of Genesis, that it was not, therefore, violently attacked by the main body of professing Christians, including the Churches, the official exponents of Christianity, who only gave a reluctant assent to it when they could not ignore the evidence any longer—even now some still stand out against it—thus eating their own words and accepting a doctrine as true which they had previously dismissed as impious and contrary to scripture—if, I say, you are trying to persuade me of these things, I frankly don't believe them. I do happen to know a little of English history in the nineteenth century, and the spiritual reflexes of the English Churches under the stimulus of the *Origin of Species*, and the resultant intellectual mess into which they got themselves are plain for all to read.

(4) That you cannot expect me to take seriously your admonition that Christians of the most diverse types "agree so far as the central doctrines of Christianity are concerned," if those whom you apparently regard as bona-fide Christians—William James, for example, and Mr. Studdert-Kennedy ("I mention them merely by way of convincing you that *Christians*" [my italics] "are very much alive to the difficulties which you raise")—may explicitly deny both the omnipotence and the omniscience of God and yet continue to entitle themselves Christians.

(5) That equally you cannot expect your assertion, that the basic ground of Christianity's claim to our belief lies in its appeal to our reasons, to carry conviction if:

(a) We have to trust not to reason but to authority "to interpret difficult passages in the Bible" and to guarantee "the inspiration of Scripture." How, one is tempted to ask, do we know that for certain points of Christian doctrine we must rely not upon reason but authority? By means of reason or of authority? If it is reason that bids us trust to authority, the authority of the Church, I can only say that my reason bids me do nothing of the kind. The Church has made too many mistakes. If it is authority, then the argument is circular, for it is the authority of the Church that bids us rely

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on the authority of the Church. Thus the Church turns out to be both judge and jury in its own cause, which seems to me to be the reverse of reasonable.

(b) Whenever we come upon some insoluble problem such as that of pain and evil, we are to abandon reason and fall back, as you suggest, at the end of your letter, upon revelation. "Christianity", you say, "is . . . a partial revelation of God . . . which defines a few great facts about God." Well and good for those who have enjoyed the revelation! But not well and no good to those who have not, who will dispose of the matter with the cheerful assertion that the experience of so-called revelation has been simply misinterpreted by those who believe themselves to have had it.

Reason is common to all, revelation is not. Hence revelation, unlike reason, can carry no conviction to those who have not shared it. And what, in any event, becomes of your contention that Christianity is accepted and defended by you solely on the ground of its reasonableness?

But I must put a stop to this. If I were to take up all the points you raise, to assure you that I am not a Communist ("Mr. Joad," as a Communist paper recently proclaimed, "belongs to the most dangerous type of counter-revolutionary"), to insist that I did not *misquote* you on the subject of Dante and Fra Angelico, but was merely concerned to point out that, if your reference to Dante was intended to imply that Christianity was true because it produced such people, the implication did not follow, and that, if it was intended to imply anything else it was irrelevant, and so on, and so forth, I should never begin my allotted task at all, to which without further ado I now proceed. I tried to prove in my last letter that the Christian view of the world is untenable. I have now to extend the argument to show that, if it were tenable, it would be intolerable. This will be done in my next letter.

Yours ever,  
CYRIL JOAD.



## VII.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
KENT.  
May 20th, 1932.

DEAR JOAD,

The case stands thus. I ask you to justify your published statements on the conflict between religion and science by naming a doctrine *de fide* to Roman Catholics which is at variance with the proved results of scientific research. You name the theory of evolution. I prove that this theory contradicts no Catholic doctrine; and you reply by telling me that you must not be expected to follow me into the "niceties of Catholic doctrines," and that you decline to be "brow-beaten with authorities of which no busy man can be expected to have heard." Those who are too busy to consult the proper authorities should not rush into print with charges which they cannot substantiate, and which they are unprepared to document.

You tell me that my being a Christian is "a topographical accident." "If you had been born in a bedroom," you write, "a few thousand miles to the eastward, you would, I should point out, have adopted one of the Hindu religions as surely as you have now adopted Christianity." I do like the fine, hearty omniscience of you moderns. How do you know where I was born? As it happens, I *was* born "a few thousand miles to the eastward"—in India, to be precise. And so, on your showing, I ought to have been a Hindu.

I am a Christian, but not because I was brought up as a Christian. I revolted against Christianity at the age of eighteen; it is therefore a fair assumption that I might have revolted against Hinduism at the same age had I been born a Hindu. After devoting many years to the study of a very large number of philosophies and rival religions, eastern as well as western, I have come to the considered conclusion that, though there is some truth in most religions, Christianity is a unique revelation. Had I been born a Hindu, I might

equally have rejected Hinduism and accepted Christianity as, in point of fact, many Hindus have done. Your suggestion that I have confined my researches to Christianity would be more effective if it happened to be approximately true. I know a good deal more about Hinduism than you suppose. My father was a missionary in India and he gave me, among other books presented me as a reward for reading them, that great Hindu epic, *Ramayana and the Mahabharata*. I ought, of course, to have remembered the chapter in this book on the *Bhagavadgita*, but it is thirty years since I read that Hindu epic, and I am afraid that what has chiefly stuck in my memory was the picture of the monkey god Hanuman. In more recent years I have read books about Hinduism, and have come to the considered conclusion that of all religions Hinduism is probably the filthiest and the most degraded. J. B. S. Haldane, who has spent some time in India and who has no use for Christianity, has infinitely less use for Hinduism. Hinduism hands over little girls of five to become the prostitutes reserved for the temple priests; it covers its temples with the filthiest of phallic pictures; it enforces child marriages which drain the vitality of the young Hindus; and, till the British Government intervened, it ordained the suttee of widows; it prescribes for the faithful a diet of cow dung and cow urine, and is responsible for a number of other equally obscene and degraded customs.

You tell me that you are too busy a man to go into the niceties of Catholic doctrine: I can assure you that I do not feel inclined to use much of my leisure in exploring the tenets and sacred literature of a religion which is responsible for such beastliness as Hinduism. In my reply to your first letter I was tempted to pass a few caustic comments on the modern habit of holding up for our admiration those eastern religions of which our moderns know even less than they know of Christianity, and I was tempted to tell you what I think of Hinduism. But I am always reluctant to attack any position, religious or political, until I have studied it exhaustively. As I said in my first letter, "there is something to be said for making a rule never to refer with contempt to any religion unless one has made an effort to investigate its claims." The difference between us is that, though I am even

more prejudiced against Hinduism than you are against Christianity, and have vastly better reasons for my prejudice than you have, I have never written a line about Hinduism and, even in reply to your provoking challenge, I said nothing until my lapse of memory about the *Bhagavadgita* forced me to define my position.

Now as to evolution. The Roman Catholic Church did not "eat their own words" or "accept a doctrine as true which they had previously dismissed as impious." The Roman Catholic Church from the very first maintained an attitude of extreme caution and reserve on this subject. You are an admirer of Samuel Butler and must therefore know that the theory of evolution was not invented by Darwin, and that the real pioneers were Catholic scientists such as Buffon and Lamarck. Evolution was in the air at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Individual theologians attacked evolution, and were probably wrong: individual theologians to-day believe in Darwin, and are certainly wrong. The Catholic Church deliberately left the question open. Its attitude might be summed up as follows: "We have seen too many scientific fashions rise and fall to put our shirt on evolution till it has been proved to be true, and until the truth of evolution has been established beyond a doubt, individual Catholics are free to believe what they wish, but the theory must not be taught in our schools."

You have delivered a rather smug lecture on the dangers of parochialism in religion, and on the necessity of studying other religions than those of one's youth, but your facts about Christianity appear to be exclusively drawn from Anglicanism. I can assure you, however, that some slight acquaintance with what you describe as "the spiritual reflexes of the English Church in the nineteenth century" does not entitle you to pontificate against Christianity as a whole.

I did not in *Difficulties* imply that William James was a Christian—he himself would never have claimed this title—and I am inclined to think that Mr. Studdert-Kennedy was a borderline case. I must repeat that the essence of Christianity consists in the belief in the deity and resurrection of Christ "He is risen" was the message that thrilled the first

century, not, as you seem to suppose, a metaphysical disquisition on the nature of Godhead, or the glad news that the Book of Genesis contained a literal and accurate account of the early history of our planet.

I am frankly puzzled to understand your difficulty in seeing the very obvious point about the relation of reason to authority. Many years ago I wrote a book called *Roman Converts*, which was vulnerable to attack and which was vigorously attacked by Roman Catholics, but I was not accused of travestying their doctrines or of misunderstanding their teaching on the subject of authority. Yet you, with a First in Greats behind you, continue to miss a very obvious point. Let me recapitulate.

The Catholic and the Protestant agree that we can prove by reason that Christ rose from the dead. The Catholic goes further: he claims that he can prove by reason that Christ founded an infallible Church. He certainly does *not*, as you suggest, appeal to the authority of the Church in support of the authority of the Church. It is not the practice of Catholics to argue in a circle. Please re-read pages 33-34.

And now for revelation. You have firmly fixed in your mind a conception of revelation as a private and incommunicable experience, but in its proper sense revelation does not mean a mystical experience, but it means exactly what it says: revelation is something that reveals. The King's Regulations are a revelation, a revelation of the rules laid down by His Majesty for the conduct of his army. The Christian revelation might be described as "God's Regulations," and, just as the King's Regulations do not tell us everything about the King, so the Christian revelation does not profess to tell us everything about God.

"Reason," you write, "is common to all; revelation is not. Hence revelation, unlike reason, can carry no conviction to those who have not shared it."

You might as well talk about sharing King's Regulations. Naturally a soldier must be satisfied that King's Regulations are authentic, and naturally the Christian must satisfy himself that the Christian revelation is authentic. When the Christian talks about accepting certain facts about God from revelation, he does not mean that God has spoken to him

in a vision. He means that he has tested the claims of Christ and that he has examined Christ's credentials to speak with authority about God, and that he has satisfied himself by reason that Christ is an infallible authority on the subject of God. I accept certain truths on Christ's authority, just as the man-in-the-street accepted evolution on Darwin's authority, just as you swallow a pill on the authority of your doctor. You would, however, be much annoyed if I accused you of "falling back upon revelation" every time you swallowed a pill.

So far as pain and evil are concerned, it is simply untrue to say that I abandon reason and fall back upon revelation. To admit that my reason is inadequate to reconcile the existence of God and the existence of evil is not to abandon reason. Nor do I fall back upon revelation: I admit that this problem is insoluble. The universe is full of problems insoluble for the scientist, but the universe nevertheless exists. And I cannot see why theologians should not, and scientists should, be allowed to leave certain problems in their scheme unsolved. I daresay you have been reading the recent correspondence in *The Times* about the universe. A finite universe, Sir James Jeans assures us, is busily engaged in expanding into nothingness. The explanations of our scientists of to-day contain far more daring challenges to common sense than anything to be found in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, far more apparent contradictions than could be unearthed by the most critical examination of Christian theology. "We must accept with resignation," writes Dr. Singer, "the inscrutable fact that there are an increasing number of antitheses in the world of our experience which science exhibits no sign of resolving."<sup>1</sup>

Yours ever,  
ARNOLD LUNN.

<sup>1</sup> *A Short History of Biology*, p. viii.

## VIII.

4, EAST HEATH ROAD,  
N.W. 3.

*May 27th.*

DEAR LUNN,

Congratulations on your dialectical luck in being born in India. "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," so obviously does God look after His own.

For the rest I am, it seems, bidden to accept all manner of things on the authority of revelation, provided that my reason tells me that the revealing authority is to be trusted, and it must tell me this, so the argument runs, if there is a well-disposed Deity who is responsible for the world, if Christ is His son, and if Christ established a Church.

Everything then turns upon the question whether it is reasonable to believe that there is a well-disposed deity who is responsible for the world, and to this question I now address myself.

I want you to look with me dispassionately for a moment at this universe in which we live, and to direct your attention more particularly to the workings of nature. You will find that of the innumerable creatures that inhabit the earth, all but an infinitesimal proportion know but two laws of life, hunger and struggle. Look at life for a moment through the eyes of a biologist, not with the prepossessions of a theologian. The biologist sees the normal species existing precariously in almost continuous contact with a margin of starvation. If by some fortunate chance, change of climate or a series of mutations, the species is lifted into temporary abundance, it immediately increases until the margin of hunger is once more reached. If, on the other hand, some other hungry species, hunter or parasite, so preys upon the original species that its numbers are brought to some considerable distance below the margin, it will have an abundance of food, but only at the cost of an abundance of danger. Thus either a species is devoured by other species or it so multiplies that there is a food shortage, involving an internecine struggle in which famine is the price

of defeat. Thus to be hungry or to be hunted is the universal lot of living creatures. Not, one would have thought, a pleasant pair of alternatives, nor, if we must suppose that the arrangement was devised, reflecting particular credit upon its author.

Or consider the waste of nature, the prodigious destruction of sperms that occurs wherever a new creature is conceived, typical of the hit-and-miss methods by which nature cheerfully commits a thousand errors and then ruthlessly discards their living results, in order to achieve a single success. Look at the mess which nature has made of the business of human birth! Lange<sup>1</sup> well compares the workings of Nature to the actions of a man who, wishing to shoot a hare in a certain field, procured a thousand guns, surrounded the field and caused them all to be let off, or, desiring a house to live in, built a whole town and abandoned to decay all the houses except one. Sometimes, indeed, things seem to be arranged only too well, to point, that is to say, not to the ordinary hit-and-miss methods of Nature, but to a designing mind whose handiwork shows a loathsome ingenuity. Here are a couple of examples taken at random:

Malaria is a horrible disease from which men die in a disgusting manner. It is also very infectious. How does Nature take steps to ensure that it shall infect as many people as possible? Her arrangements, which are exceedingly ingenious, have recently been discovered by Sir Ronald Ross. The following is an extract from an account of his discovery: "There are hundreds of kinds of mosquitoes. Some species do not carry infection at all. Those which do so imbibe from the blood of human beings spores of crescent shape. These immediately begin to change their form. From those which are male infinitesimal threads break out. They enter and fertilise the female cells, which then pierce through the skin of the mosquito's stomach. Their contents disperse into the insect's blood, are conveyed by a gland, unknown till Ross discovered it, into the mosquito's proboscis, and with its bite are injected into the human blood, to complete the vicious circle."

At every point in this wonderful series there were a hundred ways of going wrong, and nothing in the nature of a signpost to suggest the almost diabolical ingenuity with

<sup>1</sup> In his *History of Materialism*.

which Nature ensured the persistence of the malaria parasite. It took four years' work before Ross could wrest from Nature her wretched secret.

W. H. Hudson tells us of certain wasps, the Ichneumonidæ, which sting their caterpillar prey in such a way as to paralyse their movements without killing them. The next step is to lay eggs in the body of the caterpillar, whose warmth in due course hatches out the young larvæ. These immediately begin to feed on their environment—that is, on the paralysed body of the caterpillar. Thus the forethought of the parents provides the larvæ with an abundant supply of live meat. Very nice for the larvæ! But one feels that from the point of view of the caterpillar the matter might have been arranged differently. Still, it is a good joke to make your dinner off your incubator. Here certainly is design; but again it can scarcely be said to be very creditable to its author.

Moreover, evolution, as you know, can go wrong. Species decay and lose their faculties. Many originally free-moving and free-living Crustacea have evolved into parasites. Not only have they lost their eyes, legs and brains, but they have become a source of continuous suffering to the creatures upon which they are parasitic. Thus, as evolution proceeds, faculties are lost; suffering is increased.

And reflecting upon these cases, which could of course be paralleled from almost any department of natural life, I am moved to ask the question which I chiefly want to put in this letter: "How comes it, in view of the evidence that stares them in the face, that human beings should have been moved to postulate not only design, but benevolent design to account for the facts of existence?"

It is on the face of things, I think you must admit, something of a puzzle that a benevolent omnipotent deity should have been invoked as the cause of all this waste and suffering. You, Lunn, or even I, or, indeed, any human being with even the most moderate pretensions to virtue, could, one would have supposed, having unlimited power, have arranged things better. Yet mankind has refused to be satisfied with anything less than a completely good and powerful Being. Why?

The short answer, I suppose, is that it is because God has Himself been anxious to claim authorship: "I make peace



and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." So Isaiah; but this answer is one which, as you will see, I (and, I should have thought, any civilised man) am unable to accept. Why, then, has it been generally accepted?

To answer the question adequately would involve an account of the origins of religion. Anthropology, the psychology of primitive peoples, the rôle of the medicine man and the priest in savage societies—all would figure in this account. It is, I take it, generally agreed that the origin of religion is to be found in the savage's fear of the unknown. All around him the savage sees the operation of forces, thunder and lightning, earthquakes and floods, which he cannot understand, or can understand only if he personifies them. And so he personifies them. The gods of primitive societies are the wielders of the forces of nature. So conceived they can be bribed with offerings and propitiated with sacrifices. Glutted and appeased, they extend their protection to the tribe and assist it against its enemies. They bestow fertility, protect the warriors, assist the crops. It is not very difficult along these lines to see how managing and interfering gods enter human history. They are human inventions created for specific purposes to strengthen man's arm and to comfort his fears. And being human inventions they bear the stamp of their creators all too visibly upon them. Literally they are made in man's image. As man is, so too are his gods, or rather his God, for I need not trouble you with the details of the process by which in course of time the multitudinous deities of the savage world are unified into a single personage, and Jehovah appears upon the scene. The change had obvious advantages; the coming together of many gods into one involved a growth in power, since all the hitherto separate potencies are now pooled in one person; it also meant an economy of propitiation and sacrifice. Again, you knew better where you were with one god than with a number, any one of whom might be jealous of the favours paid to his rival. Jehovah is a very formidable person indeed; a jealous, touchy and terribly vindictive old gentleman seated somewhere above the clouds, he reflects all the most unattractive characteristics of his not very attractive creators. The Greeks and Romans were amorous and equalitarian. The sexual activities of their gods are

## USES OF JEHOVAH (ANCIENT)

accordingly varied and abundant, nor do they disdain the embraces of mortals. Understandable and very human creations—I always think—these classical gods! But Jehovah is cast in an altogether sterner mould. The deity of a struggling Semitic tribe with the somewhat rudimentary tastes of nomadic pioneers, his moral outlook reflects the limitations of his progenitors, his function is prescribed by their paramount need for protection. The Jews are continually in danger of being swallowed up by their powerful neighbours; they are in consequence intensely nationalistic, which means that they make a virtue of keeping themselves to themselves and regard foreigners as wicked. Hence the well-known characteristics of Jehovah, his touchiness, his jealous guardianship of his monopoly of godliness, and his fury, if worship due to himself is deflected to the rival gods whose existence he refuses to recognise. In virtue of these characteristics he becomes the symbol of Jewish unity and nationalism. Hence, too, his ferocity. The Jews themselves are pretty fierce; they had to be, or they would have been conquered and enslaved by Syrians, Assyrians and Babylonians; they are also Puritanical, setting their faces against corruption by foreign ways which after the manner of their kind they identify with “abominations.” There could, therefore, be neither mercy for the foreigner in war nor intercourse with him in peace. It was in support of this policy of no intercourse and no mercy that Jehovah was found to be of the greatest service. Weighing in at moments of crisis with some terrific outburst of invective, he incites the Jews to a brutal ferocity of which short of divine sanction even they might have proved incapable. Do you remember how, not satisfied with the destruction of Jericho by earthquake followed by a fire, the savage Israelites “utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and ass, with the edge of the sword. And they burnt the city with fire,” and how this massacre was at the “express command of the Lord”? Or listen to the accents of Jehovah himself: “Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.” You remember the sort of thing, and you remember too what a

terrible fuss there was when Saul spared the lives of a few sheep.

You wonder why I am reminding you of all this, why I insist on taking you through these not very creditable episodes of our early history? To demonstrate the functions which gods have historically performed, and to show too why, men being what they are, it was necessary to invent gods or God to perform them. You will, I know, the point being by now sufficiently plain, spare me the necessity of following up the later history of gods and God, of describing to you the different rôles they and He have been called upon to fill, and the success with which they and He have filled them. Thus I may the more quickly come to modern times; for do I not hear you already protesting that these stories from the past have no bearing upon the religion of the present, and that the demonstration of the savage origin of religion in fear and vanity is irrelevant to its status and validity of today?

The religious consciousness, you will say, develops. The God it worships today is no projection of the imagination, but an independent and objective reality of whose existence it is intuitively assured. But suppose that the religious consciousness is deceived, and that the argument for God's independent and objective reality is but the most ingenious of the devices which man's mind, grown sophisticated, uses to trick itself, disguising from itself its own skill in the construction of figments for fear that, should it realise their true nature, it might cease to believe in them; suppose, in fact, that the human needs which manifestly gave rise to gods in the past can be shown to be still engendering them today.

In support of this supposition I ask you to consider with me for a moment the state of contemporary man. Versed in modern science, his reason cannot but assure him of his own insignificance. The universe as revealed by science was not, it seems, designed to produce life. In only one tiny corner of the universe, upon a little speck of burnt-out ash, the casual by-product of material forces which have produced planets as an afterthought, does it appear. For the rest, so far as we know, the universe is without life. Negligible in space, life is equally negligible in time. For most of its history the universe has been lifeless, and, so far as we can see,

through the unimaginable æons of its future the universe will again be lifeless.

To show that these remarks are not the product of my own jaundiced imagination, permit me to quote that pious scientist, Sir James Jeans. The universe he describes from the point of view of physical science as consisting "of a fortuitous jumble of atoms, which was destined to perform meaningless dances for a time under the action of blind, purposeless forces, and then fall back to form a dead world. Into this wholly mechanical world, through the play of the same blind forces, life had stumbled by accident. One tiny corner at least, and possibly several tiny corners, of this universe of atoms had chanced to become conscious for a time, but was destined in the end, still under the action of blind mechanical forces, to be frozen out and again leave a lifeless world."

Thus in the vast immensities of astronomical space and geological time, life appears as a tiny glow flickering uncertainly, and doomed ultimately to extinction. A casual and incidental passenger, it travels across a fundamentally mindless environment in which the alien and the brutal condition the friendly and the spiritual.

I have spoken so far of life as a whole. What of human life? Human beings are a part of life; they have appeared late and their numbers even now are comparatively small. For some twelve hundred million years there has been life of some sort upon our planet; for only one million, on the most generous acceptance of the various types of sub-men as men, has there been human life. This human life is to all intents and purposes tied to the surface of the earth. It cannot penetrate more than a mile or so below that surface, or exist more than a few miles above it. Hence, you may, if you like, think of man as a mere emanation of decaying matter. In its early days the earth was a mass of molten stuff, a flare of glowing gas, burning and flaming with the generous fires of youth. Its youth past, it cooled and, as it cooled, its surface solidified into a crust. Finally this crust, composed of decaying matter, began to rot, and, festering, bred life much as a rotting cheese will breed maggots. Life, then, is the offspring of the world's decay.

Mind, I am not putting forward this account as my own. I do not, as you know, accept the view which regards life as a mere product of material forces and the world of physical matter as being the only world, any more than Sir James Jeans accepts it. That passage from his book which I have just quoted describes the future of the world as forecasted by the mechanist science of fifty years ago. But it was precisely upon this science that you and I were brought up. It dominated the outlook of the generation to which we belong, and unconsciously oriented our attitude to the world; my philosophy students, for example, always begin by instinctively assuming that only material things are real. Common sense is today, as always, the petrified science of fifty years ago, and the man in the street of our generation accepts his cosmic insignificance as his birthright, feeling it in his bones none the less surely because he thinks he knows how lightning is caused, is safe from fire and flood, and has lost the savage's fear of thunder.

Now it is just this sense of insignificance that the ordinary human being cannot tolerate. Knowing his own unimportance he protests against his knowledge. He longs to be significant, to matter to someone, to *count*. And so he invents, or rather, he makes use of an invention that has come to him from the past of an immensely powerful being whose chief, if not whose sole, function is to attend to him and his concerns. The more power he attributes to this being, the more he dignifies himself, since in mattering to a being so potent his own importance is enhanced. As with His powers (it seems inevitable that the capital letter should introduce itself at this point), so with His wisdom and goodness. His main function is to care for and to further the interests of those who believe in Him; but if He were liable to mistake or imperfect, His affection might be misplaced, His support given to the undeserving. Endow Him with all wisdom and all perfection and you ensure against these contingencies; a wise Being only furthers a winning cause; a good Being only cares for the deserving. Thus, endeavouring to increase their own significance by multiplying the powers and virtues of the Being to whom they mattered, human beings have been satisfied with nothing short of the attributes of omnipotence

## USES OF GOD (MODERN)

and omniscience. It is of such a Being that, I say, modern man stands in need, and it is precisely such a Being that he finds ready to his hand bequeathed to him by his savage ancestors. All that he has had to do is to adapt Him to modern requirements.

The task was not very difficult; the Christian God of today is only Jehovah in modern dress. He is the supreme example of what Mr. Norman Douglas—no doubt, you have read that delicious conversation in the boat between Keith and the Bishop in *South Wind*?—has called an upstairs or vertical God. Accommodated with a position above the clouds—have you noticed, by the way, that there are no indigenous vertical gods in Latin countries where the clear, floorless skies are not adapted to the accommodation of deities in a sitting position?—he is admirably placed for surveillance and espionage. We none of us, it is clear, get our deserts in this life. The world honours fools and fawns on knaves; our weakness is oppressed by the powerful, our poverty outraged by the spectacle of the wealthy; men of inferior talents are raised above our heads, while the wicked flourish like a green bay tree.

But all this, although it escape the negligent eye of the world, is witnessed by the all-seeing eye of God. In His omni-notebook He records on the credit side those merits which this world unaccountably overlooks, records, that He may not omit to compensate us in the next; on the debit side are entered the arrogance and pride of those who humiliate us with a view to compensations of a different order, different and less agreeable. But it is not necessary to wait until the next world for the rewards of God's favour; properly impertuned, He may intervene on our behalf in this one. Hence, prayer and the belief in its efficacy.

Prayer is a deliberate attempt on the part of the pray-er to induce the prayee to do something in his favour—that is, to act otherwise than He would have acted if no prayer had been offered. It is, that is to say, an attempt to induce the prayee to change His mind. God is the most prayed to being in the universe, and it is to be presumed, therefore, that He is regarded as extremely given to changing His mind. How this can be, if He also always wills what is best, I leave you

to judge. Perhaps He wills that it is best to change His mind as the result of prayer. However this may be, every sort of inducement from bribery and cajolery to denunciations and threats,<sup>1</sup> from the upstanding independence of those who address God as equals demanding their rights to prostration of the person and sheer grovelling self-abasement, is brought to bear upon the Almighty with the object of inducing Him to perform His function of assisting us. Nor is it only in regard to ourselves that we endeavour to change His intentions. The more altruistic pray for others; to counsel the Almighty how to deal with His creatures has always been one of the main functions of the Church.

The mention of others reminds me that the uses of God are by no means confined to individuals. He is employed by governments, by classes and by nations. Since the era of Christianity His social utility in particular has become very marked. The Christian virtues are precisely such as a governing class might have prescribed in the governed for benefit of the governors. Meekness and humility, temperance and unselfishness, contentment in that state of life to which (as you have corrected me) it *shall* please God to call them, with their thoughts centred on heavenly things and not on Trade Unionism or Socialism—what could be more desirable, what more convenient? That last phrase, by the way, about heavenly things and Trade Unionism is from the dialogue between Cusins and Undershaft in Shaw's *Major Barbara*. You might with advantage read it—it is only a couple of pages long (pp. 236, 237 in the old green edition), and it brings out very clearly the utility of religion in taking the revolutionary edge off poverty and discontent, a utility which the governing classes have not been slow to exploit.

Listen, for example, to Napoleon, who knew most of what was worth knowing about the art of government, defending himself for refusing, although a sceptic, to be drawn into anti-clerical legislation: "What is it," he asked his critics

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*: Here lie I, Martin Elginbrodde:  
Ha'e mercy o' my soul, Lord God,  
As I wad do, were I Lord God,  
And ye were Martin Elginbrodde.

FROM AN ABERDEEN TOMBSTONE.

“that makes the poor man think it quite natural that there are fires in my palace while he is dying of cold? That I have ten coats in my wardrobe while he goes naked? That at each of my meals enough is served to feed his family for a week? It is simply religion, which tells him that in another life I shall be only his equal, and that he actually has more chance of being happy there than I. Yes, we must see to it that the floors of the churches are open to all, and that it does not cost the poor man much to have prayers said on his tomb.” And Napoleon is quite right. What Christianity does is to tell the poor man that this life is fundamentally unimportant, the next immensely important. One’s position in this life is only to be regarded in so far as it determines one’s prospects in the next, and nothing is so detrimental to success in the next world as success here, nothing so conducive to success there as misery here.

Hence, ever since some early governing class realist slipped the story of Lazarus into the text of St. Luke, and the parable about the camel and the needle’s eye into the mouth of Christ, Christianity has made for political quietism and the conservation of the political *status quo*. Promising the poor man divine compensations in the next world for the champagne and cigars he is missing in this one, it helps him to do without the champagne and cigars; it even helps him not to envy those who have them, by assuring him that they will come to a bad end hereafter—the camel-needle business again—and admonishing him that, whether they do or not, luxury is a sin anyway. Hence, the value of Christianity to governments. God is cheaper than a living wage, and the governing classes have found it expedient to exploit Him to the utmost.

If you will allow me one more quotation to clinch the point, let me regale you with a passage from a book, *An Enquiry into the State of Mind Among the Lower Classes*, published by Mr. Arthur Young in 1798: “A stranger,” says Mr. Young, “would think our churches were built, as indeed they are, only for the rich. Under such arrangement where are the lower classes to hear the word of God, that Gospel which in our Saviour’s time was preached more particularly to the poor? Where are they to learn the doc-



trines of that truly excellent religion which exhorts to content and to submission to the higher powers? . . .”

The governing classes were emphatically of Mr. Young's opinion. In the circumstances it is not surprising to find that: “Twenty years later,” I am quoting from the Hammonds' *The Town Labourer*, 1760-1852, “one Englishman out of seven being at that time a pauper, Parliament voted a million of public money for the construction of churches to preach submission to the higher powers. In the debates in the House of Lords in May, 1818, Lord Liverpool laid stress on the social importance of guiding by this means the opinions of those who were beginning to receive education.”

But it is by peoples in their relation to other peoples that God's assistance is most frequently invoked—invoked and, if we may judge by the prodigious slaughters that men have made of their fellow-men, most frequently given.

The Greek gods had favourites and protected them; Paris having been overthrown and disarmed in single combat by Menelaus, is in imminent danger of his life, so Venus snatches him away, covers him with a silver mist, and puts him down in his own chamber in Troy. The custom of obtaining the assistance of gods in battle, so naïvely begun by the Greeks, has continued ever since, until it has culminated in the “God of Battles.” We laugh at the multitudinous warring gods of Olympus, but the Greeks at least had the sense to see that the same god could not assist both sides at once, and accordingly each side had its own divine supporters. We, on the other hand, having rolled all the gods into one, have only one to pray to, with the result that European history has frequently witnessed the spectacle of warring nations confidently praying to the same protector for victory against one another. This, when you come seriously to think of it, is an astounding piece of imbecility. You laugh at me for supposing that God could give the scholarship to more than one boy at once; I was only fifteen, and having, as you point out, had a Christian upbringing, still in the stage of believing what I had been told. But what are we to say of nations who continue confidently to exhort God to “scatter” the king's “enemies, and make them fall;” to “confound their politics” and “frustrate their knavish tricks,” when they

could convince themselves by a moment's reflection that the kings "enemies" are putting up a precisely similar prayer in respect of themselves? And that you may not evade by stigmatising "God Save the King" as unofficial and not, therefore, true Christian doctrine, allow me to supplement with "Save and deliver us, we humbly beseech Thee, from the hands of our enemies; abate their pride, assuage their malice and *confound their devices*" (my italics), from the prayer to be used "in the time of War and Turmoils" in the English Book of Common Prayer. This deliberate request to God to do harm to His own creatures is so familiar to Christians that its strangeness excites comment only among agnostics.

It is in war-time that these anomalies become most apparent. "God could not stop the European war," said an English bishop, "but He did the next best thing; He produced a million recruits." German bishops, equally confident of divine support, blessed Him for His bountiful supplies of *German* cannon fodder, so that, if we were to take a dispassionate view of God's war-time activities in terms of results, one can only suppose that His main concern in the matter was the death and mutilation of the maximum possible number of young men. Yet it is, perhaps, in our relations with inferior peoples rather than with our European equals, if I may unpatriotically venture so to term our late enemies, that our confidence in God's goodwill has had the happiest results. It was the theologians and the jurists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries who promulgated the doctrine that "lands inhabited by infidels were rightly to be acquired and exploited by Christians, and that the lands of Africa belonged to no man." This doctrine was at once acted upon by the merchants and trading companies, who obtained letters of right from their respective Kings to "invade, conquer, storm, attack and subjugate and to reduce the natives to helotism; occupying and possessing in the name of the King and the Christian Church."

No country has felt more confidence in its divine mission to acquire land "in the name of the King and the Christian Church" than our own, nor can the very great services rendered by the Almighty in the extension of our Empire be

justly overlooked. That well-known procession in which, under pretext of exploration and colonisation, the flag follows the filibuster, and trade follows the flag, has always insisted on the missionary to bring up the rear, and it may well be the case that without his assurance that it was God's will that black men should be ruled by white, as a reward for their submission to whom they were to be instructed in His ways and wishes, our Empire would not have reached its present splendid and secure condition. Certain it is that, whenever those whom we have from time to time added to it have shown signs of resenting the benefits we have decided to confer upon them by occupying their country, we have had no hesitation in ascribing the successes secured by our superior weapons to the direct intervention of the Almighty in our favour.

Here, for example, taken from an old Prayer Book, is a "Form of Prayer and Thanksgiving to Almighty God," printed in 1846, for the "Repeated and signal Victories obtained by the Troops of her Majesty and by those of The Honorable East India Company in the Vicinity of the Sutledge, whereby the unjust and unprovoked Aggression of the Sikhs was gloriously repelled, and their Armies totally discomfited." The prayer so well illustrates the attitude I am describing and is so typical of its kind that I cannot refrain from quoting a few sentences:

"O Lord God of Hosts, in whose hand is power and might irresistible, we, Thine unworthy servants, most humbly acknowledge Thy goodness in the victories lately vouchsafed to the armies of our Sovereign over a host of barbarous invaders, who sought to spread desolation over fruitful and populous provinces enjoying the blessings of peace under the protection of the British Crown. . . . To Thee, O Lord, we ascribe the glory: It was Thy wisdom which guided the counsels, Thy power which strengthened the hands of those whom it pleased Thee to use as Thy instruments in the discomfiture of the lawless aggressor, and the frustration of his ambitious designs. . . . Continue, we beseech Thee, to go forth with our armies, whensoever they are called into battle in a righteous cause."

You see with what sublime confidence we demand and

## SUMMARY OF GOD'S SERVICES

assume God's support. Nor, when you reflect upon the circumstances of His origin, is this confidence seen to be misplaced. God is guaranteed to take the same view of the rights and wrongs of a quarrel (or a treaty) as we do ourselves, because it was for precisely that purpose that we evolved Him. The more the pity, therefore, that other nations will insist on demanding the same support and professing the same confidence in obtaining it. This competition for God's assistance is one of the great drawbacks of monotheism.

And so you see how in a thousand ways "God works . . . His wonders to perform." In a thousand ways He assists the purposes of those who invoke Him; He is sympathetic to our aims, attentive to our interests, malleable to our desires. He constructed the brute creation to satisfy our material wants—as I write, I have before me a sermon preached by an early nineteenth-century divine expatiating on God's goodness in giving rabbits white behinds, thus making them a better target for human sportsmen—and thoughtfully included the beaver and the ant to edify us with their industry.

He assists our armies and extends our Empire; He even confers a *cachet* on our commerce, or rather He does if He is a foreigner, for, although fastidious about our own, we do not hesitate to make use of other people's gods. I am writing by the light of an admirable electric bulb, the Mazda lamp. The significance of the name, I take it, resides in the fact that Ahura Mazda is the Zoroastrian God of light. This stealing of the lighting of other gods for purposes of salesmanship is not, I cannot help thinking, in the best of taste. I wonder what you would say if, travelling in Persia, you came upon a hoarding by the roadside exhorting you to "Buy our Jesus Lamps. The Light of the World!"

Yours ever,  
CYRIL JOAD.

## IX.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
[ KENT.  
*June 2nd, 1932.*

DEAR JOAD,

The first part of your letter adds nothing to your argument. The whole problem of evil is raised by the existence of one small child suffering severe pain, and you do not strengthen your case, which has already been discussed at considerable length, by the rhetorical device of piling up example after example. You are like the people whose faith was shaken by the Great War, but who had apparently contrived to reconcile the existence of God with every other war from the dawn of history up to and including the South African War. "God can get away with a lot of things," your argument seems to imply; "children smitten by incurable diseases, the agonies of battlefields, plague and volcanic eruption, but when it comes to the *Ichneumonidæ*—well, that's a bit too steep. God can't get away with them."

There are two problems which must be kept distinct, the existence of God and the nature of God. Your jolly little wasps do not, as you yourself admit, invalidate the argument from design to a designer. Indeed, you admit the presence of design, but suggest that "it can scarcely be said to be very creditable to the author."

I wonder, by the way, how an orthodox Darwinian would explain the *Ichneumonidæ* !

By admitting design, you have admitted the existence of an intelligent designer. Whether that designer is benevolent or malevolent will be discussed in due course.

And now anthropology comes into the picture. Anthropology is popular with the moderns because very little is known about primitive peoples, and consequently they can invent any theory they like to discredit religion and get away with it. It is so much safer than arguing about the Resurrec-

tion or Transubstantiation or any of those other "niceties of Catholic doctrine" where one is liable to be tripped up by unsporting people who will persist in referring to authorities one is too busy to consult. No such dangers attend an excursion into the realms of pre-history.

Let me begin by registering a vigorous protest against your habit of substituting the words "It is generally agreed" for the more honest "I think." In one of your recent books I counted a series of these, all of which prefaced statements for which there is no agreement, general or otherwise. This protest is necessary, for this habit of implying a background of general scientific agreement for highly controversial statements is a recognised dodge of the omniscientists, to borrow Father Knox's admirable description of writers "who select those statements, those points of view, which tell in favour of the thesis they want to establish, concealing any statements or points of view which tell in a contrary direction, and then serve up the whole to us as the best conclusions of modern research, disarming all opposition by appeal to the sacred name of science."

It is not "generally agreed" that the origin of religion is to be found in the savage's fear of the unknown. You should read Dr. Schmidt's great work on *The Origin and Growth of Religion*. Dr. Schmidt is a scientist, not an omniscientist, and his authoritative work has been translated by Professor Rose, who was slightly senior to you at Balliol. Dr. Schmidt, who has devoted more years to these problems than you or I have devoted minutes, has come to the considered conclusion that it is precisely the most primitive people who retain the tradition of monotheism. He draws particular attention to the case of pigmy races, "of dwarfish people inhabiting Central Africa, the Andaman Islands, the peninsula of Malacca and the more retired parts of the Philippines. He tells us that he finds everywhere "a clear acknowledgment and worship of a supreme being . . . the supremacy of this being is so comprehensively and energetically expressed that all other supernormal beings are far inferior and invariably subject to him."

From which it would seem that monotheism does not represent, as you suggest, a later development, but, on the

contrary, polytheism would seem to represent a degenerate and degraded form of the purer and more primitive monotheistic belief.

You next proceed to favour me with a spirited attack on Jehovah, who emerges, as you yourself rather reluctantly admit, more creditably than the Greek gods from your severe handling. The Jewish conception of God was undoubtedly coloured, as you suggest, by their own peculiar outlook, but the Jewish religion at its best produced some of the noblest spiritual literature in the world. If you re-read<sup>1</sup> the Psalms and Isaiah, you will revise your theories of Jehovah. I shall return to this point later.

We now come to an old friend, the theory which explains God as a projection. Tansley, in his *New Psychology*, states the case for this view very effectively. Theism, he holds, is due to "the tendency of the mind to project what is calculated to make for peace of mind. A man feels lonely and projects the idea of a loving father." It does not occur to Tansley (or to you) that projection might equally well explain the atheism of men like Samuel Butler or Bernard Shaw in revolt against the Calvinistic conception of God. If one had been brought up in a Calvinistic tradition, it would certainly make for peace of mind to "project" atheism.

I wonder what wish fulfilment is realised by the belief in hell—a nice comfortable belief, hell !

These clever new psychologists begin by assuming what it is their business to prove. They ignore the proofs for the existence of God, assume that God is an illusion, and set to work to explain how this particular illusion arose. But all the facts, including the facts that you mention, are just as tolerant of a theistic as of an atheistic interpretation. If God exists, as we believe, there is no reason to suppose that the theology of primitive people will not be coloured by their primitive mentality. The views of primitive people about the sun and moon are very different to the views that we hold to-day; none the less, the sun and moon exist.

If God exists, the theory of projection merely restates the truism, first affirmed by Christian philosophers, that our

<sup>1</sup> Note the exquisite courtesy of "re-read."

human and finite conceptions of the divine must be affected by our human and finite limitations.

Your next point is that science makes us feel dreadfully insignificant. Incidentally, it is amusing to note that, whereas fifty years ago the Christian was derided for ever having supposed that this planet was the centre of the universe, and was urged to reflect on the probability of millions of inhabited planets circling round millions of distant suns, we are now told that our planet is probably a unique accident. "For the rest, so far as we know, the universe is without life." Why this glad news should depress or humble me, I cannot tell. On the contrary, I am pleased to note that science confirms the Christian instinct which tended to regard our planet as the scene of a unique and dramatic experiment, and man as the crown of creation. You must really think of something better if you want to make my flesh creep. Incidentally, is it not rather strange that science should inculcate modesty in one generation by assuring us that planets such as ours are scattered throughout the universe, and in the next generation by assuring us that our planet is unique?

All this worship of infinite space and astronomical light years is merely part and parcel of that snobbish worship of mere size which is such a distressing feature of the present age. Pascal has the last word on this subject:

"L'homme n'est qu'un roseau, le plus faible de la nature; mais c'est un roseau pensant. Il ne faut pas que l'univers entier s'arme pour l'écraser: une vapeur, une goutte d'eau, suffit pour le tuer. Mais, quand l'univers l'écraserait, l'homme serait encore plus noble que ce qui le tue, parce-qu'il sait qu'il meurt, et l'avantage que l'univers a sur lui; l'univers n'en sait rien."<sup>1</sup>

All the facts which you produce are as easy to explain on the hypothesis that God exists, and that he has revealed himself to man to guide him to heaven, to comfort him in distress and to hearten him in weakness.

<sup>1</sup> "Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water, suffices to kill him. But, if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this."



I will deal with the whole subject of prayer in a subsequent letter.

Your next complaint is that Christianity has exploited the poor in the interests of the rich.

You have already been reproved in this correspondence for gross misquotation from the Catechism. You repeat the offence under the sincere impression that you are really getting it right this time. The Christian virtues, you tell us, prescribe "contentment in that state of life to which (as you have corrected me) it *shall* please God to call them." I suppose I ought to be grateful for the fact that you have at least got the tense right this time ("shall," not "hath"), and if I hammer away long enough you may in time get the rest of the quotation right and substitute "do my duty" for "contentment."

If you are an honest controversialist, you will have the decency in your next letter to admit that you have grossly misinterpreted the Catechism, and that the resolve "to do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me" is an unimpeachable sentiment, and might be echoed with sincerity by a navvy who was determined to become Prime Minister or by a socialist who was determined to abolish the upper classes. Please do not evade my challenge on this point; I expect an apology to the Catechism in your next letter.

Your persistent misquotation is an excellent example of the difficulties with which we Christians have to contend, of the ignorance which is literally invincible<sup>1</sup> and of a prejudice which continues to resist the pressure of undisputed fact.

There is some truth in your statement that the Christian virtues "are precisely such as a governing class might have prescribed for the governed for the benefit of the governors." Some truth, but not the whole truth, for Christianity is a climate in which slavery cannot flourish, and a creed which emphasises the infinite dignity of every human soul cannot

<sup>1</sup> "Invincible ignorance" is a term of endearment common among Catholics, and is applied to non-Catholics who are nice enough to be worth saving from Hell on the plea of "invincible ignorance" of the true faith. I fear that your chance of scraping into Purgatory on this plea is greater than mine.

be favourable to the cultivation of purely servile virtues. But my real criticism of this statement is that it is incomplete. As usual, you have been so pleased with scoring an apparent point against Christianity that you have not bothered to probe below the surface. You have only given us one side of the picture. The answer is, of course, that the Christian virtues are precisely such as the underdog might have prescribed for his governors for the benefit of the underdog. If all masters had been inspired by the Christian virtues, there would be precious little social discontent to-day.

I do not myself believe that the gospels provide a hopeful quarry either for capitalists or for communists, for Christ, so it seems to me, was concerned with the individual and his relations to God rather than with problems of social reform. To say: "Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor" is not quite the same thing as saying: "Take all that he hath and distribute it among your pals." None the less, the emphasis in all the gospels is on the tremendous danger of wealth. Had the gospels been edited by the governing classes, they would have been purged of many a text manifestly inspired by sympathy with the underdog. "He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away."

Do you really suppose that this sort of thing is calculated to inspire the lower classes with contentment, meekness and humility?

Vaguely aware of the difficulties of your position, you try to anticipate the obvious rejoinder by suggesting, or rather by baldly stating that "an early governing class realist slipped the story of Lazarus into the text of St. Luke's, and the parable about the camel and the needle's eye into the mouth of Christ."

Now this sort of thing, my dear Joad, would be all very well if you were lecturing to an audience of uncritical undergraduates, who would no doubt welcome with delight anything which tells against Christianity. You and I both acquired the technique for this sort of thing in the debating societies at Oxford, but we have both grown older since those

far-off Balliol days, and you must try to remember that we are engaged in a serious correspondence about the greatest of all possible issues. In this correspondence you will be expected to back up your assertions with proof, and you will not be allowed to assume that any text which is inconvenient for your theories has necessarily been interpolated.

Meanwhile will you allow me, in all courtesy, to describe your excursion into higher criticism as a museum piece of modern bosh? *Quod gratis asseritur gratis negatur.*

I am prepared to admit that the governing classes have made more than one attempt to exploit Christianity in their own interests, but this proves not that Christianity favours the rich but that noble things may be prostituted by base men for base ends.

I am inclined to think that there is something to be said for Mr. Belloc's contention that Calvin was the spiritual father of modern capitalism. I come of Irish Protestant stock on my mother's side, and I have a natural understanding of Mr. Shaw's Irish Protestant background, a background which has many affinities with Calvinism. The dialogue which you quote from *Major Barbara* reflects Shaw's reaction against a form of Protestantism which has many virtues, but which is certainly inclined to identify Christianity with the principles expounded in Smiles's *Self-Help*.

Few Anglicans would dispute Arthur Young's view that Anglicanism in 1798 was far too closely identified with the upper classes. The Anglo-Catholic revival did a great deal to destroy the smug, self-satisfied erastianism which you very properly criticise. It is a pity, however, that you cannot see the sun for the sun-spots. You have spent so much time in unearthing facts to discredit Christianity that you have no leisure to find out the really important facts about Christianity. Had you spent a little time in some of the East End parishes, you would soon realise that Anglicanism has long since ceased to be the religion of the rich. Again, you might read what John Wesley has to say on the subject of riches and their danger. Wesley practised what he preached. As a young man he had an income of about fifty pounds a year: he lived on twenty-eight pounds and gave the balance away. As an old man he had an income of about four hundred a

year: he still lived on twenty-eight pounds and gave the balance away.

With the exception of one quotation from Napoleon, your examples are drawn, as usual, from Anglicanism. It is curious that a man like you, who are cosmopolitan in your tastes and international in your politics, should be so quaintly insular in your outlook on religion. The Catholic Church has been fairly successful in its struggle to curb the natural acquisitiveness of human nature. I do not pretend that it has been completely successful in restraining the arrogance of the rich, but at least it has consistently upheld the virtue of "holy poverty." Eighteenth-century England glorified the industrious apprentice as a typical product of Protestantism: Catholicism reserves its highest honours for the saintly monk and for the saintly nun. Again, the guild system of the Middle Ages was a magnificent attempt, and recognised as such by writers who, like Mr. G. D. H. Cole, are completely hostile to Christianity, to realise the ideal of a society in which profit-making was far from being the main motive. The guildsman expected a fair return for his labour, but the ideal of the guild was good workmanship rather than big profits. The Middle Ages made an heroic attempt to solve problems of social justice which still remain unsolved, and I sometimes wonder whether the modern world would not be a far happier place if the great doctors of the Church had succeeded in their attempt to impose upon the world their conception of "just price." Again, had the Church succeeded in suppressing usury, which might be defined as interest on unproductive loans, the present crash, which Mr. Belloc foretold in *Essays of a Catholic*, might conceivably have been avoided. I do not wish to dogmatise on these points, but merely to suggest to you that your discussion of the Christian attitude to social problems is superficial and one-sided. Please give your reference for the charter ending with the words: "In the name of the King and the Christian Church."

I propose in the latter half of the book to reply in detail to your general charge that the Church has always favoured the rich against the poor, and the white man against the black.

Yours ever,

ARNOLD LUNN.

X.

4, EAST HEATH ROAD,  
HAMPSTEAD, N.W. 3.  
7th June, 1932.

DEAR LUNN,

Three points before I get on:

1. *Hell*.—You wonder “what wish fulfilment is realised by the belief in hell.” You forget the unselfishness of Christians; it was not of themselves that those early priests were thinking when they lovingly filled in the outline of hell with their picturesque detail, but of others. Hell—I shall hope to dwell upon it later—is clearly one of the most potent weapons in the Christian armoury. A man flouts your authority or questions your monopoly of spiritual truth! What could be more obvious? You consign him to hell. And the more he annoys you, the hotter you make it. Clearly hell fulfils a wish.

2. *The Catechism*.—Unaccountably you keep accusing me of misquotation when I am not in fact quoting at all. You did it over the Dante, Chartres, Fra Angelico business; now you have done it again over the Catechism. I take the imputation the more hardly, as I have recently been at pains to look up that surprising document to verify your rebuke about “*shall*” and “*has*.” You were, of course, right and I acknowledge it. But that does not in the least mean that I am either quoting from, or even seeking to interpret the Catechism, in the passage to which you refer. The passage is not in inverted commas, and I am at a loss to understand why it should have provoked you to such a scathing indictment. All that I am saying is that *Christianity* requires men to be content in that state of life to which it shall please God to call them. You answer that the *Catechism* requires them “*to do*” their “*duty*” in that state of life. . . . No doubt! But I wasn’t quoting it. Even if I had been, I don’t understand what the fuss is about. Surely Christianity requires us to do our duty contentedly and with a glad heart—I have heard sermons enough on the

## WHY CHRISTIANITY DENOUNCES WEALTH

subject in my life—so that, if you tell me we are not enjoined by Christian doctrine to make the best of the position whatever it may be in which God is pleased to place us, I shall say that you are quibbling and refuse to believe you. Yet this, as you no doubt know, was the whole substance of the point I was making.

3. *The Rich and the Poor.*—You point out that the Gospels denounce the rich, as if the fact were damaging to my assertion that Christianity has been a useful governing class instrument. In truth it illustrates and endorses it. The Gospels are full of dispraise of wealth and praise of poverty. They purport to put the fear of God into the rich and the proud by telling them how they are to be “scattered” here and burnt hereafter, whereas the poor and humble are to be exalted hereafter. Also the hereafter is of transcendent importance and indefinite duration. What, I ask you, could be better calculated to induce people to put up with the insolence of the proud and the ostentation of the wealthy? Who, one wonders, would not in the circumstances be poor and humble if he could? Perhaps, however, on reflection this is asking a little too much of human nature, for I personally have observed no concerted rush among the rich to qualify for the hereafter, which they are required to believe to be of such transcendent importance, by becoming poor. Still, if you *are* poor, this sort of thing does help you to bear it. And is not this just my point that Christianity has caused people to put up with a bad present by offering them the bait of a perfect future, if they stick it without complaining?

However, I must get back to my thesis. In my last letter, you will remember, I described the very palpable uses which an omnipotent God had been designed to serve. And frankly I find the kind of thing I described intolerable.

I have quoted these cases only that I might bring home to you the human origin of this Being whom people worship as God, and the human, often the base human uses that He is called upon to serve. If there were in fact a creative God, such as most religions, including, as I have laboured to point out, the Christian religion, postulate with the functions, the intentions, and the character, or lack of it, that most religions (including the Christian religion) attribute to Him, I should

give up the universe in despair. In my first letter I tried to show that the Christian view of the universe was untrue because it was logically untenable. I hope that I have now made plain my reasons for gratification at the fact that it is untrue; for, if it were true, the resulting conception of human life and destiny would be unendurable.

Just reflect for a moment upon the implications of some of these Divine attributes I have noted. Take, for example, the conception of God implied by the Christian practice of prayer. In moments of supreme pain and peril that we should so far forget ourselves as to cry out to Heaven to give us ease and relieve our danger is natural, and, because it is natural, pardonable enough. But to make petitions to God when we are in full possession of our faculties is not only unreasonable in us, but must surely be offensive to God. We pray to each other knowing that we are fallible and err through haste, knowing too that we are feeble in purpose and given to changing our minds. Such prayers may therefore be offered to human beings without impropriety and with hope of success. But, surely, if there is such a God as Christians hold, a God who gave us life and reason and all good gifts, a God too who desires our happiness, He does not need that we should remind Him of anything. Is it really compatible, do you think, with the alleged omniscience and benevolence of God that His creatures should have to draw His attention to the fact that rain is wanted in Rutlandshire? Does He really commit oversights?

But worse than oversight is imputed to God; for when we beg Him to give us what we desire, do we not attribute to Him weakness and irresolution, hoping by importunity to incline the balance in our favour?

You imply in your letter that it must have consorted with God's plan to make our mortal bodies, capable as they are of all agreeable sensations, capable also of pain and suffering. As hunger and weariness are an integral part of mountaineering, so, you suggest, pain and suffering are an integral part of life. Without them it "would lose its savour." Reason and nature—or so Christianity holds—agree that God loves us; yet He permits us to suffer pain and misery. Surely, then, to ask Him to suspend the operations of nature for the benefit

## GOD'S APPROVAL OF COMBATANTS

of any individual sufferer is not only to degrade Him by the imputation of inconstancy, but to shut our eyes to the light He has given us. If this is so in regard to prayer on behalf of those we love who suffer, how much more does it apply to the common or garden prayer which seeks only the benefit of the person praying?

If the conception of the God who can be moved by prayer is degrading, that of the God who encourages war and backs selected combatants is savage. The first is the conception of a child; the second that of a tribesman. To believe it, civilised men must send their minds to prison; to profess it, they must wrap their souls in the garments of hypocrisy. Just think for one moment of the terrible difficulties in which the attempt to reconcile God's benevolence and omniscience with His approval of slaughter and backing of the Allies would have landed you as a conscientious clergyman in the last war. For years past you would have been expatiating upon the existence of an omnipotent and loving deity who personally supervises the world's affairs. Being benevolent, you would say, He is naturally grieved at this terrible catastrophe that has come upon us. Of course, you would go on, He had foreseen it all along, and would have stopped if it He could—although, of course, He had the power to stop it, if He had really wanted to—although, of course again, you would hasten to point out, we must not suppose that His failure to stop it, rather surprising, perhaps, to a superficial mind, meant that He didn't want to, for, of course, being benevolent, He must have wanted it stopped.

At this point, a little bewildered perhaps by your own arguments, you would make a fresh start. "Here," you would say, "we have a kindly God who has given man free-will, in spite of knowing in advance exactly what would come of it; that being so, He could not very well with dignity withdraw His gift and interfere, although, of course, He could have done so had He judged it really desirable to stop the slaughter, as, being a merciful God, He no doubt wanted to . . .," and so on, and so on. You see the sort of mess you would get into.

When we remember that each of the combatant nations was assuring God in precisely the same language of its own



pacific intentions and the unique purity of its aims, and petitioning God in precisely the same terms for precisely the same things, one feels that even God's omnipotence must have been taxed to please all His creatures at once. You remember J. C. Squire's poem:

"To God the embattled nations sing and shout:  
'Gott strafe England' and 'God save the King';  
God this, God that, and God the other thing.  
'Good God!' said God, 'I've got my work cut out'?"

This sort of thing, I repeat, seems to me intolerable. I do not myself believe that any Being such as Christian individuals and nations invoke, a Being who created and is responsible for this world, exists. If I did, I should give up thinking altogether as a bad job, and retire into business or politics or some other practical occupation, where one *does* things without bothering about the effects of what one does. And I should give up thinking simply because I could not endure the thought of a universe, such as ours appears to me to be, being deliberately planned and purposed.

Let us, however, assume for a moment that it is. To what sort of planner does the evidence dispassionately considered seem to point? To answer the question I must be permitted to do a little god-making on my own. I conceive, then, as the author of this world a Being bored with the stretches of eternity through which he has lived and anxious for diversion. In particular he has grown tired of listening to the interminable praises of the angels. For why, after all, should they not praise him? Did he not deserve their praises? Had he not given them complete and endless joy? And so He set to work to make a new kind of creature, one upon whom He proposed to inflict every conceivable kind of misfortune, yet constructed upon a plan so ingenious that the more He harried and oppressed it, the more eagerly it would turn to Him and praise Him, blessing the author of its misfortunes and thanking Him because things were no worse.

And so He made Man. Man said, "There must be a hidden purpose, could we but fathom it, and the purpose is good"; for, as God had expressly endowed Man with the faculty of veneration, he must reverence something, and in the visible

## PARADOX OF MAN'S WORSHIP

world he could find nothing worthy of reverence. So Man decided that there must be another world, better and nobler, inhabited by a better and nobler being called God, and that God intended harmony to come out of chaos by human effort; and for this he blessed God. And when he followed the instincts which God had transmitted to him from his ancestry of beasts of prey, he called it Sin, and asked God to forgive him. But he doubted whether he could be truly forgiven until he had been punished, and so he felt remorse for what he had done, and chastened himself with the stings of conscience, thus making his life even more miserable than it might have been. And seeing that things were bad he made them yet worse, that thereby he might console himself with the hope of a better future. And considering that his sufferings were sent to discipline him and to prepare him for this future, he blessed God for sending them and thanked Him for the strength which enabled him to forgo even the joys that were possible. For such is the nature of Man! When his Maker afflicts him, he praises Him; when He visits him with misfortune, he persuades himself that all is being done for his own good; when troubles continue to heap themselves upon him, he prays to their author in unabated confidence for their removal. The more he suffers from earthly things, the more he turns to heavenly things; the more he is humbled before man, the more does he exalt himself before God; the less cause he has to be grateful, the more does he sweat with thanks. In short, let things be as bad as they may, he will never fail in praises to God that they are no worse.

"What a conceited ass!" thinks the Almighty. "Whatever I do, he thinks it is all for his benefit. The more I hurt him, the more pride he takes in it. And how he does love me!"

And God was much amused, and, when man had become perfect in renunciation, he sent another sun which crashed into man's sun and all returned to the primæval nebula.

"Yes," said God, "it was a good play. I will have it performed again."

I would present to you, then, God<sup>1</sup> as at worst a malignant spirit who has conceived the world, as a sadist might conceive

<sup>1</sup> The portrait is not all my own. Its main lines are already sketched in Bertrand Russell's *The Free Man's Worship*.

a tragedy, to indulge his taste for cruelty; at best as a comic spirit who has planned the world as a man might plan a practical joke with Man as chief butt, and takes a mischievous pleasure in contemplating its anomalies. At worst God derives pleasure from human suffering; at best amusement from human absurdity.

Let us take Him at best as a jester whose jokes, not, perhaps, in the best possible taste, are still not really vicious, and see what evidence there is to support such a view. First and foremost, there is the fact that the worse the lot of human beings in this life, the more grateful do they seem to be to the Being who is, presumably, responsible for it. I have already noted how religion has traditionally flourished among the poor and wretched, while those who have a reasonably good time are comparatively indifferent to the author of their blessings. Those who live hard and dangerous lives are pious; the secure and comfortable are lukewarm. Suffering and disaster—the fact is notorious—turn men's thoughts to God. Nothing promotes belief in His goodness so effectively as a war, a famine or a volcanic eruption, while national misfortunes are everywhere recognised as the appropriate occasions of a religious revival. As I write, I have before me some statistics showing the Church attendances of a village community on the coast of Newfoundland which lives by oyster fishery. The statistics have been collected by one of those Americans, ubiquitous before the slump, with a passion for odd information, the object of this particular enquiry being to investigate the effects of worldly prosperity upon religious observance. He has produced a graph showing the relation between the number of oysters caught and the number of worshippers in Church. The figures are very interesting, showing what is called an "inverse one-one correspondence"; that is to say, when the oysters were many, the worshippers were few; when the oysters were few, the worshippers were many. A good joke this, surely, to receive gratitude when you have done least to deserve it, to be praised when you have merited anathema.

If I am right in assuming that this sort of thing really amuses God, He must find the contemplation of this world highly and continuously entertaining. He causes a volcano

## EXAMPLES OF DIVINE HUMOUR

to erupt, with the result that the villages at its foot are completely destroyed. When the disturbance has died down, the surviving inhabitants rebuild the old villages in precisely the same places. Presently God destroys the villages again, and they are again rebuilt.

You would say that these people were stupid; they are, but they are also pious, grateful to God for allowing them to rebuild their villages, grateful, indeed, for being permitted to exist at all, perpetually offering prayers for protection from the volcano. What fun! thinks God, and sends another eruption.

At times I detect traces of a more subtle humour. Have you noticed, for example, how frequently during an earthquake, when the frightened population rushes to the local church to pray for safety, the church topples down and buries the worshippers. Take, for example, this quite recent cutting from a newspaper.

“At San Juan in the Province of Cosoomatepec, during an earthquake, the collapse of a church steeple, which fell on the crowds of refugees who were praying inside the building, caused many casualties.”

Or this effort in the same vein:

### “TRAGIC TRIBUTE.

#### *Child Killed by Falling Cross at Father's Grave.*

Going to the cemetery to put flowers on her father's grave, Marjory Hindmarsh, aged four, of Cawthorne Terrace, Preston Village, North Shields, was struck by a stone cross which fell from an old tombstone on the next grave.

She died an hour later from her injuries and shock.”

Not content with using His own monuments, as instruments for the destruction of His own adherents who have approached Him for the express purpose of putting their trust in Him, God permits them to be poisoned when they are expecting to be purified by the blood of His Son. Take, for example, the following:

C. E. M. J. TO A. L.

“POISON ‘WINE’

*Varnish Stain Drunk in Error at Communion Service.*

NEW YORK, MONDAY.

An extraordinary poisoning affair is reported to-day from Grand Rapids, Michigan, the victims being ten elders of the Seventh Reformed Church.

All ten are in a serious condition, and it is feared that two of them may die. The poison has been traced to ‘wine’ used at a Communion service yesterday, which proves on examination not to have been wine at all, but turpentine varnish stain.

(A Central News Telegram states that the liquid had been left behind by some painters and was used by mistake.)”

I used to wonder whether this occurrence disproved the doctrine of Transubstantiation. But I suppose that in the light of the distinction you make in your first letter between substance and accidents, I must agree that it doesn’t do anything of the sort. Moreover, as the service was not a Catholic one, the appropriate incantation would not have been uttered over the varnish stain, which could not, therefore, in any event be or become anything but varnish stain. But, even if this is not to be taken as evidence of the Almighty’s perverse pleasure in disproving the doctrines of His own Church, it is difficult to resist the evidences of the divine humour in the next example.

Whatever may be the attitude of enlightened bodies such as the Catholic Church, which you tell me now countenances the doctrine of the simian origin of man after violently opposing it for some fifty years, you must know that there are in America vast numbers of people who consider themselves devout Christians and who maintain, very rightly in my view, that the doctrine of evolution in contradicting, as it most certainly does, the first chapter of Genesis strikes at the very basis of the Christian faith. Accordingly the state of Kentucky, where this old-fashioned form of Christianity is apparently the faith of the majority of the inhabitants, recently approved a law to punish any reference to evolution in its schools. “On the same day” (I am quoting from a report in the papers) “a girl was born in Knoxville, Ten-

## MORE EXAMPLES

nessee, with a tail seven inches long. This has been removed and will be sent to the Johns Hopkins University at Baltimore, where it will be kept to show that a referendum may deny the truth but cannot evade it."

I like this; it is in a more genial vein than some of the preceding efforts; not so much suffering is involved. I like, too, the following; it is from a recent report of the proceedings of a Wesleyan Conference:

"*Wesley's Chapel*. Attacks by the death-watch beetle on John Wesley's old chapel in City Road, London, the Mecca of Methodist pilgrims from all over the world, were the subject of a committee's report.

Short of rebuilding the roof, the report added, there was no guarantee that the trouble would not break out again.

'The activities of the beetles,' said the Rev. G. H. McNeal, minister of Wesley's chapel, 'are incessant, their appetites are insatiable and their time is their own.'"

The love of the death-watch beetle for Wesley's chapel seems to me to be significant as showing that, whatever the falling off in church and chapel attendances among humans, God intends to ensure, and in the most unobtrusive possible way, that Churches shall still retain all and more of their popularity in other quarters; which reminds me that since the question has been raised of the possibility of taking the Bible literally, I had better let you have an authentic recent example showing that, even in these modern times of theological squeamishness, it can still be swallowed whole. The following is from the *Morning Post*, March 2nd last:

TORONTO,  
Feb. 26th.

"Bertie, a youngster of seven, yesterday demonstrated that a whole Bible can be swallowed, if not digested. In his birthday cake was placed a small Bible encased in metal. The slice of cake containing the Bible fell to his lot, and he swallowed both cake and Bible. . . . The Bible was removed by operation.—*Reuter*."

I do not propose to tax our readers' patience with any more instances of the divine humour. I might have gone on to point out its working in the sphere of sex; the anomalies

and absurdities—I suppose God would think them funny—which arise from the fact of His having made men polygamous and women monogamous; or in the sphere of international relations, particularly rich, by the way, in illustrations just at the moment. Why is it, I have often wondered, that trouble so often follows when God seems to be interesting Himself in foreign affairs? But I have said enough, perhaps, indeed, too much, for you may be beginning to take this section as a serious statement of my beliefs, which is the last thing I should wish you to do.

I do not myself, I repeat, believe that there is a Being who created this world and interests Himself in its affairs. The Being who is commonly invoked for the purpose seems to me to be a mere product of human anthropomorphism created by men in their own image to satisfy their own desires. Aristotle, you may remember, pointed out that, if oxen had a god, they would represent him as a glorified ox; and to supplement his view I would like to draw your attention to Rupert Brooke's poem on a Fish's Heaven. It is so pat to my purpose that I cannot refrain from quoting you some of the lines:

“This life cannot be All, they swear,  
For how unpleasant if it were!  
One may not doubt that, somehow, good  
Shall come of Water and of Mud;  
And, sure, the reverent eye must see  
A Purpose in Liquidity.  
We darkly know, by Faith we cry,  
The future is not Wholly Dry.  
Mud unto Mud!—Death eddies near—  
Not here the appointed end, not here!  
But somewhere, beyond Space and Time,  
Is wetter water, slimier slime!  
And there (they trust) there swimmeth One  
Who swam ere rivers were begun,  
Immense, of fishy form and mind,  
Squamous, omnipotent, and kind;  
And under that Almighty Fin  
The littlest fish may enter in.  
Oh! never fly conceals a hook,  
Fish say, in the Eternal Brook,  
But more than mundane weeds are there  
And mud, celestially fair;  
Fat caterpillars drift around,  
And Paradisal grubs are found;  
Unfading moths, immortal flies,  
And the worm that never dies.”

## IMPORTANCE OF SELECTING EVIDENCE

Now for this human conception of a glorified human deity there is, I admit, plenty of evidence. The universe, it is obvious, contains an immense miscellany of different things. Among them some constituting, when all allowance is made for doubtful cases, a considerable body of evidence bearing witness to a purposive and possibly benevolent intelligence operating the scheme of things. Others do not; others, as I have just shown you, bear witness to the activity of a malicious humorist bent on perpetrating jokes in the worst possible taste. If God is an invisible showman who pulls the strings by which His puppets are twitched into love and war, it would be delicious irony to hear them insisting on their complete freedom of will. If He tortures them for His amusement, it would be diverting to receive their gratitude for torments received, and if from time to time He carelessly leaves about the Universe traces of His real nature and His real design, how amusing if the puppets tumbled over themselves in their eagerness to cover them up, devoted all their ingenuity to proving that they were not there, and violently abused and persecuted those who drew attention to them.

My object is not to insist that the practical joke conception is necessitated, but that, if we select our evidence carefully enough, it becomes plausible and could be made convincing. It is upon just such a tendentious selection of evidence that the conception of an omnipotent deity creating the universe in pursuance of a benevolent plan seems to me to be based. The world, I repeat, if we make an arbitrary selection of the facts to which alone we propose to attend, shows evidence of design; but it also shows evidence of lack of design, and, worse, of malignant design. But whether you postulate design or no design, and, if you postulate design, the sort of intelligence you infer behind it, depends almost entirely on the sort of facts which you choose to regard as significant. Thus, while a devout Wesleyan will deduce from a still summer's evening of surpassing beauty evidence pointing to the power and goodness of God who created it, Thomas Hardy is primarily attracted by the "cry of some small bird that was being killed by an owl in the adjoining wood," from which the undrawn inference of the cruelty of the spirit, if any, behind nature is equally apparent.



My own temperamental predisposition in this matter is Hardy's. If I were to accept the design theory, I not only should try to be honest to the extent of accepting the evidence for malignancy along with the rest, but I feel that I should find the evidence for malignancy more impressive than the rest. This I simply cannot bring myself to do. I, like many other moderns, rather pride myself on my capacity to look facts in the face. But to believe that there is a Being who devised the workings of Nature, permits human suffering, browbeats innocent people with undeserved misfortune, consigns unbaptised babies to hell, is too much for my hardihood. Rather I fall back upon the comparatively pleasant and comfortable belief that this physical universe is a chance one, its sufferings unintended, its evil unplanned.

Thus, while in my last letter I argued that the Christian view of the universe was untrue, I now affirm that for me, at least, it would be an unbearable world, if it were true. I have argued that it is untenable; I now add that it is intolerable.

Yours ever,  
CYRIL JOAD.

## XI.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
KENT.  
*June 12th, 1932.*

DEAR JOAD,

Hell, as I pointed out in a previous letter, is not the invention of the Christian priesthood, but is accepted on the authority of Christ. As you have repeated your original remark, without noticing my correction, I do not think it would be profitable to add anything further on the subject unless you decide to give me Hell and your views on it in a subsequent letter.

Your defence of your misquotation is so ingenious that it is a pity you did not think of it earlier to justify your first misquotation from the Catechism which, like your second, is unadorned by quotation marks. The "contentment" which is a legitimate object of Christian ambition is dynamic rather than static, and is very different from that servile contentment which you accuse us of trying to foster in the lower classes.

The thorny problem of prayer which you raise in your last letter is difficult to discuss within brief compass. A general indictment often calls for detailed defence. Since you spent a night at Suttoncroft I understand your position much better than I did. I am now convinced that you sincerely misunderstood the doctrine of prayer, as taught to you in your youth, and genuinely believed that *all* prayers were automatically answered. Very strange. How could such absurdity, contradicted by the daily experience of Christians, survive one year, let alone nineteen hundred years?

Surely the highest type of prayer is "Thy will be done." Even Christ submitted to the possibility of an unanswered prayer: "Oh, my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

It is difficult to discuss prayer intelligently with people of our generation, most of whom stopped praying in their early

youth, with the result that their ideas about prayer are coloured with the memory of youthful petitions about scholarships or a place in the Eleven or, in altruistic moods, for one's house team to win the footer final. And it is, I suppose, vague memories of this type which explain the popularity of that curious gibe against Christianity which is based on some supposed incongruity in the spectacle of two nations praying to the same God for victory. You say the other house won the final in spite of one's prayers, and it is therefore silly to pray for victory in the C ck House Match of the Marne.

But if you think of the British and Germans as two litigants, pleading their case before the highest of all tribunals, the difficulty vanishes. You suggest that it is absurd to pray for victory, because the enemy is "putting up a precisely similar petition," but it is unusual for one counsel to throw up his brief because the other counsel is also petitioning the jury for a verdict in his favour.

Like most other moderns, you show no appreciation of the fact that prayer is a science, and you betray no acquaintance with the vast literature on the subject. Your criticisms of prayer are based, as I shall show in this letter, on a complete misconception of orthodox theology. I do not think that you are qualified, either by personal experience or by study, to contribute to the solution of this problem. As well might a schoolboy who had studied the first book of Euclid hope to add anything of value to the theory of relativity. But it is all to the good that you should ventilate freely the popular no less than the more recondite arguments against the Faith.

Let me begin by remarking that the type of prayer which you criticise is the humblest, the most elementary and the least spiritual of all types of prayer. Not that there is anything wrong in praying for oysters, more particularly if, as in the case of your Newfoundland fishermen, oysters represent their livelihood. Christianity differs from these manufactured and academic religions which we are offered by Julian Huxley and other members of the intelligentsia, in that it caters for every degree of spirituality from the saints to the Newfoundland fishermen. Christ did not die for high-brows alone. Your Newfoundland fisherman is a better man

if he prays for oysters than if he did not pray at all, just as there may be slightly more hope for the Neapolitan brigand who prays to the Blessed Virgin than for the gunman who never sullies his lips with an *Ave Maria*. Nevertheless, to concentrate your attack, as you do, on the "more oysters, please" type of prayer betrays an ignorance of the subject curious in one who writes so freely on the subject of mysticism. Have you ever noticed, by the way, that the Lord's Prayer, the only Christian document which the average modern can be trusted to quote correctly, only contains one prayer for temporal blessings, "Give us this day our daily bread," a prayer which, incidentally, is normally answered?

To read your letter one might suppose that prayer consisted entirely of petitions, and rather unworthy petitions at that. You have entirely overlooked the element of praise. The instinct to say "Thank you" is not much weaker than the urge to say "Please." I stopped saying my prayers at the age of eighteen, but the moments at which I have been most tempted to regret having broken that useful habit were not the moments when I was depressed, but moments of great joy. When I found myself alone on a rocky ledge with a leg bone sticking through my stocking, I addressed a succession of noisy prayers to the human race to come and find me, but neither then nor during the eight hours which passed before the relief of chloroform was I conscious of any urge to invoke God's assistance. On the other hand, there have been many moments among the hills, particularly on the shores of mountain lakes at dawn, when I have felt an overpowering need to say "Thank you" to the giver of beauty. That in itself is no evidence that prayer is a reality, but it suggests that the instinct to pray is not derived solely from the desire to obtain favours from the Almighty.

Then, again, there is the type of prayer which is, in effect, a wordless conversation between the soul and God. Henry Ghéon, in his admirable *Life of the Curé d'Ars* (Sheed and Ward), tells the story of an old peasant who remained for hours before the crucifix without even moving his lips. "And what do you say?" the Curé asked. "Oh," replied the peasant, "He looks at me and I look at Him."

If you could find time to read Alice Lady Lovat's *Life of*

*St. Theresa*, you would understand the difference between the prayers of your Newfoundland fisherman, a praiseworthy, but elementary type of prayer, and the prayers of a saint. *St. Theresa* describes various degrees of prayer, beginning with the first degree which all may attain, and ending with the divine union which is attained by the great mystics alone, and I ask you to observe that even in the first degree of prayer there is no allusion to prayer for temporal benefit.

“To meditate with simplicity on the mysteries of our Saviour’s life; to keep in His presence, expect all things from His love for us, and to abandon ourselves entirely to Him ‘in order to follow Him even on to Mount Calvary, helping Him to carry the Cross, and never leaving Him alone to bear its burden’: these are the solid foundations on which *Theresa* bases the edifice of prayer. This is the first degree to which all may attain, and all persevere in, by the ordinary succour of divine grace.”

Now listen to what *St. Theresa* herself has to say:

“In this prayer (of quiet) there is a gathering together of the faculties of the soul within itself, in order that it may have the fruition of that contentment in greater sweetness; but the faculties are not lost, neither are they asleep. The will alone is occupied in such a way that, without knowing how it has become a captive, it gives a simple consent to become a prisoner of God.”

The supreme object of prayer is not the attainment of temporal benefits (such as oysters), but may be summed up in the words of *St. Theresa* herself, “Lord, that I may know Thee, that I may know myself” (*Noverim te, noverim me*).

Briefly then the Christian prays for five different reasons: first, because Christ prayed, and what was good enough for Christ is good enough for the Christian; secondly, because Christ both commanded us to pray and taught us how to pray; thirdly, because those who have approached nearest to Christ, the saints, have achieved their sanctity by prayer; fourthly, because it is a matter of common experience, verified by countless millions of Christians, that prayer is an effective weapon against sin; fifthly, and lastly,

because prayers for temporal blessings are sometimes granted.

To return to your specific charges. "Prayer," you say, is ridiculous because God "does not need that we should remind him of anything." Is it necessary that we should "draw his attention to the fact that rain is wanted in Rutlandshire? Does he really commit oversights?" And again, "when we beg him to give up what we desire, do we not attribute to him weakness and irresolution, hoping by importunity to incline the balance in our favour?"

It would save time and space in our correspondence, if, before attacking what you conceive to be a Christian doctrine, you would ring me up on the telephone to discover whether the doctrine in question is held by Christians. "It is not necessary for us," writes St. Thomas Aquinas, "to offer our prayers to God so as to let Him know our needs and desires, but so that we may reflect upon ourselves and so have resort to the divine assistance in all things." And again, "nor is prayer meant to change God's arrangements, but to obtain by our prayers what God has arranged."<sup>1</sup>

So for once you are in agreement with St. Thomas, which must be highly gratifying to you and, perhaps, to him.

When God created the world he foresaw all the prayers that would be prayed and took them into consideration. Actually what you have been attacking is not an orthodox Christian doctrine, but a private heresy of my own which you will find very fully discussed and very effectively answered by Father Knox in our joint book *Difficulties*. You might do worse than read pages 143-199.

Whatever view we may take of the timelessness of God and of the relation of freewill to omniscience (the real difficulty in the orthodox theory of prayer), even if we think of God as making up his mind at this moment, we are not justified in accusing him of caprice or of altering his mind because he takes our prayers into consideration. If a Colonel of a regiment issued an order to the effect that applications for leave during August must be made in writing to the Adjutant during June, you could not accuse him of caprice or of changing his mind because he took into consideration

<sup>1</sup> *Summa Theologica*, II-II, lxxxiii.

the date on which applications were made, and the question of whether the application had been made in accordance with his order. Similarly, God must not be accused of caprice or of changing his mind if he does not answer prayers which are not made in accordance with certain conditions which he himself has laid down and does answer those that are. I am quite prepared to admit that the real drive behind prayer is the belief that God is open to influence, and that the granting of a petition is both *post hoc* and *propter hoc*, and not, as St. Thomas seems to imply, *ante hoc* and *propter hoc*. Revelation certainly suggests that God means us to think of prayer as if he was listening to it and making up his mind at the time the prayer was offered. There is a real difference, as Tyrrell points out, between devotion (*lex orandi*) and theology (*lex credendi*), between the explanation of prayer and the practice of prayer.

Here are a few paragraphs from Tyrrell's essay *Lex credendi, Lex orandi*:

"In the measure that God is dehumanised by philosophy, He becomes unreal and ineffectual in regard to our life and conduct."

"Devotion tends to become more and more anthropomorphic and forgetful of the inadequacy of revelation, and thus to run into puerilities and superstitions. Philosophical theology tends to the other extreme of excessive abstraction and vague unreality."

"Any rationalist explanation that would make prayer non-sensical, or would encourage laxity, or would make havoc of the ordinary sane and sensible religious notions of the faithful, is *eo ipso* condemned as not squaring with facts. So far, for example, as the philosophical conception of God's independence tends to create an impression that He is not pleased with our love, or grieved by our sin, it is opposed to revelation, which says: 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit'; or 'My Spirit will not alway strive with man'; and which everywhere speaks of God, and therefore wants us to think of God, as subject to passions like our own. And in so thinking of God, we think inadequately no doubt, but we are far less inadequate than were we to think of Him as passionless and indifferent."

## RESULTS OF PRAYER

I think few Catholic theologians would disagree on this point with Tyrrell. I am prepared cheerfully to admit that few people could pray unless they had first humanised the philosophy of prayer. St. Thomas Aquinas himself must have contrived to forget that his prayers had been heard and answered before the dawn of time during the period when he was actually on his knees. Otherwise he could hardly have composed the very beautiful prayer which he himself made every day before he took up his pen. There would be far less nonsense written to-day if all authors offered up this prayer every time they put pen to paper. Here are the concluding paragraphs:

“Thou who makest eloquent the tongues of little children, fashion my words and pour upon my lips the grace of Thy benediction. Grant me penetration to understand, capacity to retain, method and facility in study, subtlety in interpretation and abundant grace of expression.

Order the beginning, direct the progress and perfect the achievement of my work, Thou Who art true God and true Man and livest and reignest for ever and ever. Amen.”

Your whole approach to this great problem is far too deductive. You begin by assuming, rashly I think, that your mind is competent to decide whether God and man can communicate, and you reject as absurd the idea of prayer because it does not accord with your own *a priori* notions on the subject. But this is most unscientific. You would do better to practise what Huxley preached (and so far as religion was concerned so signally failed to practise). “Sit down before fact like a little child.” You are beginning at the wrong end by trying to formulate a philosophy of prayer before you have collected the facts. And what are those facts?

It has been proved beyond dispute that the most radiantly happy people are those who have cultivated a life of prayer, an important consideration if happiness is the end of man, a point on which all schools of hedonism, Christian and pagan, agree. There is overwhelming evidence to show that prayer helps men to meet with gay courage adversity and physical pain, to conquer self and to neutralise the force of



sex. Undoubtedly prayer achieves solid results, which a real scientist must take into account.

It is odd that one who speaks so appreciatively of the mystics, and who believes so firmly that mystics have attained a deeper knowledge of objective spiritual reality than other folk, should hold such low views of prayer, for the mystics are unanimous in their belief that the road to mystic union is paved with prayer. You are like a man who played no musical instrument but who adored Paderewski, and who yet expressed the greatest contempt for the methods, such as hard work and scales, whereby Paderewski had perfected his technique and developed his genius. If, as you assert, the mystics were not deluded, it might be wiser, as it would certainly be more modest, to sit at their feet and learn from them rather than to pour contempt on their methods. If you were to discuss this problem not with somebody like myself, who has only an academic knowledge of the subject and who is completely unspiritual, but with a man who had lived the life of prayer, he would probably reply in some such words as these: "There may be no completely satisfactory explanation of prayer, but does that matter? Is the explanation really so much more important than the result? If I waited till I understood how God answers prayer I should never pray. And if I did not pray, there would be no results for you to explain away."

And now to return to your natural theology. I do not agree that a fish would necessarily think of God as a fish. If he disliked God as strongly as you do he would think of God as an angler. A dog, I am inclined to think, would probably think of God as a man, something like his master.

Your attack on Christian theism may be summed up as follows. Arbitrarily selecting our facts, we can find evidence in support of the view that God is good, or that God is evil, or that God is a practical joker. From the kind of facts we select, we can determine the conclusion which we secretly desire to reach. Therefore the Christian's God does not exist.

Let us apply your theory to Mr. Bernard Shaw. Arbitrarily selecting our facts, we can find evidence in support of the view that Mr. Shaw is a noble prophet, or that Mr. Shaw

is a pernicious traitor, or that Mr. Shaw is a mountebank. From the kind of facts which we select we can determine the conclusion which we secretly desire to reach. Thus the modern highbrow will believe in Shaw the prophet, and the Tory Colonel in Shaw the traitor and mountebank. Therefore Mr. Shaw does not exist.

Surely the fact that a particular problem is tolerant of various solutions of varying degrees of plausibility merely proves that its solution will be discovered, if at all, by those who can take an intelligent survey of *all* the available facts, and not by those who concentrate on those facts which accord with their preconceived ideas. And I suggest that if you take *all* facts into consideration instead of allowing yourself to be dominated by an emotional reaction against the cruelty of certain aspects of the universe, you will see the force of Christian theism and will no longer wish to believe, and will therefore cease to believe, in the peculiar type of God which you preach in your books.

The God in whom you ask us to believe has dissociated himself from the universe and declines any responsibility for sin or suffering. A mystic, you tell us, may contemplate God, but God is unaffected by such contemplation, and though to achieve it may be the end and purpose of life's evolution, God is unaware of the movement of life towards him.

Rather a supercilious type of deity. I confess that my own instinctive desires would bias me in favour of something rather more matey, but it is clear that you at least have tried to believe in the kind of God in whom you want to believe.

Now you have written an excellent chapter in your most entertaining autobiography (*Under the Fifth Rib*) on "The Cult of Unreason." You have shown that the new psychology not only attacks the foundations of rational thought, but that it has also destroyed intelligent conversation, for people are refusing to discuss any view on its merits. They are interested, not in the view expressed, but in the secret and unavowed instincts and desires which explain why the view in question is put forward by its champion. "What can be meant by rationality," you ask, "if our reasons are the mere tools of our unconscious desires?" I made much the same point in my book, *The Flight From Reason*, and I should be delighted to wel-

come you as an ally in our battle against the cult of unreason. But in your attack on Christian theism you exploit the type of arguments which you condemn, for you suggest that it is impossible to arrive at objective truth about God, seeing that our views of God must be the mere reflections of our unconscious desires. Never in the history of the world was it more essential that those who are fighting the losing battle of the mind should defend with all possible energy the last outposts of sane rationalism. No man is entitled to describe himself as a rationalist unless he is prepared to subscribe to the creed: "I believe in truth. I believe in reason. I believe in the possibility of arriving at truth by the use of reason. I recognise that human reason is apt to be clouded by prejudice, that it is only too easy to ignore facts which tell against, and to emphasise facts which tell in favour of, a desired conclusion, but I believe that it is possible by the discipline of thought to arrive at a disinterested survey, not of a few selected facts, but of all the available evidence."

Now I maintain that this disinterested survey of *all* the available evidence leads us to reject the conception of God as evil or the conception of God as a practical joker. Life on the balance is good. This world of ours, with its beauty, its romance and its adventure, is, in spite of its incidental cruelty and suffering, infinitely better than a dreary chaos of lifeless matter. It was Archdeacon Paley, by the way, who used the argument which you attribute to a "pious Wesleyan." The passage is worth quoting, if only for the charm of its eighteenth-century prose:

"It is a happy world after all. The air, the earth, the water, teem with delighted existence. In a spring noon, or a summer evening, on whichever side I turn my eyes, myriads of happy beings crowd upon my view. 'The insect youth are on the wing.' Swarms of new-born *flies* are trying their pinions in the air. Their sportive motions, their wanton mazes, their gratuitous activity, their continual change of place without use of purpose, testify their joy, and the exultation which they feel in their lately discovered faculties. A *bee* amongst the flowers in spring is one of the cheerfulest objects that can be looked upon. . . . If we look to what the *waters* produce, shoals of the fry of fish frequent the margins of rivers, of

## THE CRUELTY OF NATURE

lakes and of the sea itself. These are so happy that they know not what to do with themselves. Their attitudes, their vivacity, their leaps out of the water, their frolics in it (which I have noticed a thousand times with equal attention and amusement), all conduce to show their excess of spirits, and are simply the effects of that excess."

You reply with Thomas Hardy that your attention is primarily attracted by "the cry of some small bird which is being killed by an owl in the adjoining wood"; but, surely the cry of the small bird refutes the pessimist, for unless the small bird enjoyed being alive he would not protest against being deprived of existence. If the pessimist is right, it is the owl who should scream an angry protest against the cruelty of a God who forces small birds into his mouth and thus compels him to continue the burden of existence instead of dying happily of hunger. Have you ever reflected on the comparative rarity of suicide among men and the virtual absence of suicide in the brute creation? And do you think this overwhelming vote of confidence in life can really be explained by instinct, that inevitable ally of the modern in a difficulty?

Your own position would be easier to defend if you had not admitted the existence of a Deity of sorts. You believe in God and you believe in evil, and the problem of reconciling the existence of God with the existence of evil is as insoluble on your hypothesis as on mine. Your absentee Deity who won't be bothered with our planet is, like the God of the Deists, philosophically indefensible, however powerfully he may appeal to your emotions.

You have set out to prove that Christianity is both untenable and intolerable. You have certainly not proved that Christianity is untenable, and the facts which you have cited may prove that Nature is intolerable, but certainly do not prove that Christianity is intolerable. Surely evil and suffering are *less* intolerable if God is in control, and if God is supremely interested in the welfare of every human soul. It is common ground between us that evil is real, and the point at issue between us is whether evil is easier to bear if we believe in the Christian God, or in a God supremely bored by the attempts of saints and mystics to establish contact with him.

These manufactured religions, yours and Julian Huxley's among others, are all very well in the books, but they wither at the touch of experience. The proper place to try out the consoling effects of these new creeds is not on the platform of an Ethical Society, but in a hospital. Try to console a patient in great pain with your private gospel, the glad news that "the physical universe is a chance one, its sufferings unintended, its evil unplanned," and if you can transmute, as Christians can transmute, misery into happiness I shall be open to conviction.

I have recently been at work on a novel, *Within the Precincts of the Prison*, many chapters of which are laid in the condemned cell. I have discussed many points with officials who have witnessed executions and who have paid daily visits to men under sentence of death. Those who know the inside of prisons are quick to detect humbug of all types, religious humbug included. Now my authorities were unanimous on one point. The contrast between the last hours of men who were meeting their death as penitent Christians and the last hours of men who died without hope was so amazing that it was impossible to account for it as the product of illusion.

It is for you to prove that the Christian illusion, if it be an illusion, renders less tolerable the admitted evils of life.

One word more in conclusion. I envy you your Peter Pan-like attitude to religion. In my own first fine careless rapture of anti-Christian reaction, I too took a delight in the sort of things which give you such pleasure, references to "vertical and upstairs Gods," and so forth. It is pleasant to remain young, and I am impressed by the boyish glee with which you collect newspaper cuttings to show up Christianity in a ridiculous light. The love of God is a fine emotion and, like all fine emotions, capable of being degraded and vulgarised. It would be just as easy to ridicule human love by a collection of extracts from cheap novelists as to expose the love of God with the aid of your religious scrapbook. As easy, and as futile.

My brother, Hugh Kingsmill, produced an admirable anthology entitled *The Worst of Love*. I suggest that you should produce a companion volume, *The Worst of Divine Love*. I

### A QUESTION OF SCALE

feel that it would have a large sale among your youthful friends.

The real truth is that you have not yet realised the scale of the thing that you are attacking. It is much bigger than you suppose.

Yours ever,  
ARNOLD LUNN.

## XII.

BROCKEN HOTEL,  
HARZ MOUNTAINS,  
GERMANY.  
June 17th, 1932.

DEAR LUNN,

As usual, I feel that I cannot let your letter pass without comment. I don't mean that I propose to answer you adequately; merely that there are one or two matters of misunderstanding or misrepresentation between us which a few words of explanation may help to clear up.

There is no analogy between two nations petitioning God for assistance in war, and two counsel petitioning a jury for their respective clients. The jury is not infallible and does not pretend to be; it has not been created by both the opposing litigants for the express purpose of deciding all matters in their favour, and it has not promised both of them that, if adequately entreated, it will in fact decide in their favour.

You say I betray no acquaintance with the vast literature of prayer. I might retort that you seem completely ignorant of the classical criticisms of the practice of praying to a God who is conceived as both omnipotent and benevolent, criticisms which, when I produce them, you insist on regarding as private and rather fractious whimsies of mine. You might look up Socrates on the subject—the end of the Second and the beginning of the Third Book of Plato's *Republic*—or the Father's rebuke to Smith towards the end of W. H. Hudson's *Crystal Age*, where the case against prayer is beautifully stated. Nor do I aspire, as you seem to think, to contribute to the solution of the problem of prayer. I put certain difficulties in the alleged solution of others and asked you to resolve them. In spite of the length of your reply, I don't think you have succeeded.

For example, you say you have felt gratitude in the presence of beauty; you have wanted to say "Thank you." So have I. But I deduce from that—it seems after all a fairly plain deduction—that beauty exists; you, apparently, that

God exists. I assert only the something which moves me and is profoundly significant; you drag in something, or rather, somebody else to make the something. Yet when faced by the "Ichneumonidæ" or the malaria mosquito you don't introduce a parallel something, devilish as the alleged something behind beauty is good, to account for them. In other words, you apply one logic of explanation to beauty and another to evil. Again, a Bach Fugue is as beautiful as a dawn or a mountain; do you, therefore, feel an impulse to pray to Bach?

You give an elaborate defence of the praying of the mystics, which you describe as the highest kind of prayer, and which culminates in divine union. This may be as it may be; however, I am not discussing mysticism, but the common or garden prayers of ordinary Christians. These are prayers for concrete goods.

Insisting that the supreme object of prayer is the knowledge of God, you dismiss as unimportant these prayers for concrete goods; you are even moved to play your usual gambit, my ignorance of doctrines held by Christians. The implication is that it is not necessary to defend prayers for concrete things, for no Christians worth the name ever make them. This time I really must protest. For what you say is simply not true. Not only do most Christians of my present and past acquaintance pray for concrete goods, but their practice is at once authorised and encouraged by the English Book of Common Prayer. Looking through it I find prayers for "Rain," for "Fair Weather," for Food—this last known as Prayer "In the time of Dearth and Famine"—and for "Peace." I find prayers asking God to stop punishing us with plagues and sickness and to stop killing us; prayers to make Bishops and Pastors virtuous and intelligent and to cause them to choose suitable persons to be the Church's recruits. And just as there are prayers to obtain these things, so there are Thanksgivings for having obtained them.

The prayers of the Church of England appear in an even more concrete form in its hymns. In fact, "Hymns Ancient and Modern" are almost entirely occupied with thanking God for past favours as an earnest of future favours to come. They ask God to give us what we want and praise Him for having given it.



The facts that this practice of the English Church does not square with the doctrines of St. Theresa, that few of its prayers are concerned to enable the person praying to know God, fewer still himself,<sup>1</sup> is nothing to the point. The English Church has influenced far more Christians than St. Theresa, and, remembering what you have already told me about authority in religion and taking things on trust from duly accredited bodies, I cannot help thinking that, although apparently, on your view, not an authority of the highest class, the English Church was fully entitled to its influence, and that persons praying have been right to listen to it rather than to her.

A little further on you quote another Christian writer, this time St. Thomas Aquinas, to the effect that praying is not intended to "change God's arrangements"; its object is merely "to obtain by our prayers what God has arranged."

Whether prayer does or does not change anything I have not the least idea. I content myself, however, with offering you a dilemma. If it does, then all the difficulties pointed out in my last letter arise and God must be credited with inconstancy of purpose. If it does not, I really cannot see the point of it; if whatever one says, and however often one says it, makes not the slightest difference, one were surely better advised "to keep one's breath to cool one's porridge." Compare the classical dilemma for Marxists;—the materialist conception of history requires us to suppose that a revolution of the proletariat is inevitable; but, if it is, why bother to work for it?

That prayer is not "meant to change God's arrangements" is simply not true. Let us take as an example a very common form of prayer, a prayer for mercy. Mercy is the treatment which we crave from God when we have sinned. Sin, we know, is wicked and ought, therefore, to be punished, and God, who hates sin, is, we recognise, not only bound but entitled to punish it; to punish it, that is to say, as it deserves. If, therefore, we ask for mercy we ask for some punishment other than that which the sin deserves, and presumably therefore—since otherwise the prayer would be superfluous—other than that which God, if left to His own devices, might

<sup>1</sup> See St. Theresa's object of prayer as given by you, p. 102.

have accorded to it. Hence, a prayer for mercy is a prayer to be let off some part of the punishment which, if God were to punish us according to our deserts, we should receive. Now God is just; inevitably, therefore, we must suppose, He would punish us according to our deserts. Therefore a prayer for mercy is a prayer to God to punish us otherwise than He would have done, had not the prayer been offered. The case is typical, for the great mass of Christian praying can be similarly shown on examination to consist of a sustained effort to induce God to change what must be presumed to be His intentions. Whether the end proposed be the invocation of an angel, the alleviation of pain, the changing of circumstance, the healing of disease, the remission of punishment, the forgiveness of sins, or merely rain in Rutlandshire, the intention is always to induce God to do something which He otherwise might not have done; nearly always to do something in our favour.

You say later that "Revelation"—I never know quite what this word means—suggests that "God means us to think of prayer as if He was listening to it and making up His mind at the time the prayer was offered." But this surely won't do. For either the "Revelation" is true, or not; if true, then God *can* be influenced, and the difficulties pointed out in my previous letter arise; if false, then God deceives us, permitting us to regard as open questions matters which are really *choses jugées*. On the first hypothesis God changes His mind and does not, therefore, always intend what is best; on the second, He is deceitful, since when everything is already determined He allows us to suppose that it is not. To put the point in your own language, if the granting of a petition is *ante hoc*, freedom is an illusion and everything is predestined; if *propter hoc*, the world is governed by God's caprice.

You say prayer achieves solid results, makes men happier and gives them fortitude. Of course it does; that is why men pray. But it ought not to be necessary to point out to you that the pragmatic efficacy of prayer has nothing to do with the truth of Christianity. What matters in practice is not that a belief should be true, but that it should be believed. How often have we all seen men cured of maladies by imbibing a little coloured water, simply because they believed

that it would cure them? I myself at a credulous age lost a troublesome wart by virtue of the sincerity of my belief that the incantations uttered over it by a quack at a country fair would magically remove it. In other words, belief is efficacious not because of the objective existence of that which is believed in, but because of its subjective effect on the believer. Faith in God moves mountains—the fact is notorious—but it does so not because of the strength of God, but because of the strength which the false belief in His strength gives to the person having faith. Thus, when you say that prayer “achieves solid results” I must add that it does so in precisely the same way and for precisely the same reason as magic, and that modern version of magic, Christian Science, achieve solid results.

Your Shaw analogy suggests that you have failed to understand the point of the argument about conclusions based on selections from evidence dictated by temperament, interests and wishes. The argument was designed to show not that no interpretation of the universe could be correct, but that we could never know that it was correct; it rebuked dogmatism rather than asserted scepticism. I admit the possibility that the Christian view may be correct, although I think it is unlikely. I was concerned merely to point out that there is in nature just as good evidence for other views and that, if we are honest, we must countenance them too. My objection to a religious creed is that it closes the mind to all hypotheses except one.

I am not at this stage to be drawn into an account of my beliefs about God, if any, any more than I am to be baited into a defence of the Life Force. I shall, if necessary, defend the former for His lack of “mateyness” and the latter for its excess of it in a later letter.

Let me finally assure you—and do please take this seriously—that, whatever may be the case with Julian Huxley, my philosophical views are not, and do not, purport to be anything in the nature of a religion. I don’t try to “manufacture” religions. The object of philosophy, as I conceive it, is not to help people, but to discover truth. I want to know *qua* philosopher what the universe is like. The object of religion is, as you say, different; it not only purports to be

TO HELP IS NOT TO BE TRUE

true, but to help people because it is true. But it is surely the simplest form of error to invert this, as the pragmatist does and as you do at the end of your last letter, and to suggest that the fact that it helps people is a reason for supposing that it is true. It helped people for thousands of years to believe that the sun went round the earth; but they were wrong for all that.

Yours ever,  
CYRIL JOAD.

### XIII.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
KENT.  
June 24th, 1932.

DEAR JOAD,

Your attempt to drive a wedge between St. Theresa and the "practice of the English Church" tempts me to use once again what you describe as my "usual gambit." Most Anglicans would regard St. Theresa as one of the greatest of experts in the science of prayer. There is a long chapter on St. Theresa in my father's book, *The Secret of the Saints*, a chapter which contains no hint of criticism. The Church of England prays for rain. Of course, and if more people attended those services in mackintoshes these prayers would be more successful. The Anglican prayer for Bishops and curates is a translation from the Roman Missal, which also contains prayers for rain, for fine weather, and prayers against storms and against cattle disease. What precisely do you mean to suggest? That the Roman Catholic Church has given up praying for temporal blessings? That the saints realised the futility of praying for temporal blessings, threw their hand in and said in effect: "Let's pray for something which is easier to get than rain, such as divine union with God"?

My point was not that prayers for temporal blessings are to be deprecated, but that a criticism of prayer based on the assumption that all prayers are prayers for temporal blessings is not particularly enlightening. And if you reply that in my defence I confined myself to defending the highest type of prayer, I will gladly remedy my omission. The Christian prays for temporal blessings for two good reasons. In the first place because Christ told him to, an argument which does not appeal to you because you do not believe that Christ was God, and, in the second place, because it is a matter of experience that the answers to such prayers greatly exceed in number what might reasonably be expected on the theory

of mere coincidence. It is right to pray for temporal blessings. It is wrong to pray only for temporal blessings. One need not be a saint to say, "Thy will be done."

St. Thomas might have distinguished between "influencing" God and "changing God's arrangements," but I doubt if he would have liked the word "influence." He would have said that God foresaw all prayers and took all prayers into account before the creation of the world, and was "influenced" by them only to the extent that he foresaw, to take an obvious example, that he would grant the prayer of the penitent thief by admitting him to Paradise and that he would punish the impenitent thief by sending him to hell. In other words, prayers do make a vital difference. The lives of those who pray, both in this world and in the next, are different from what their lives would have been had they not prayed.

St. Thomas would incidentally have disputed your assertion that God is "bound to punish sin." This deprives God of the prerogative of mercy which, being God, he is entitled to exercise as seems best to him. It does not necessarily follow that God acts capriciously because Mr. Joad cannot square God's actions with the Joadian philosophy.

We shall waste a lot of time and space if you persist in shoving at an open door. I have already conceded that I do not find St. Thomas' theory of prayer very helpful, but then I cannot begin to make sense out of the orthodox theory that God is outside of time. 'Fetch me a peasant from the plough,' writes Schopenhauer; "make the question intelligible to him, and he will tell you that even if all things in Heaven and on Earth were to cease, Time would nevertheless flow on." Plain, blunt man that I am, I agree with the peasant from the plough, but you, who are a philosopher, and who attach some meaning to the conception of a Deity who is outside of time, have no right to criticise St. Thomas merely because his conception of prayer involves certain apparent contradictions. It is really naïve to assume that any human theory of the relations between the finite and the infinite, between creatures in time and the Creator outside of time, can possibly be free from apparent contradictions. Why you should expect me to solve problems which

the finite brain is clearly incapable of solving, I do not know.

My answer to your dilemma, "Either Revelation is true or not," etc., is to quote from Sir William Bragg's Robert Boyle lecture, in which he called attention to the discrepancy between the theory of the explosive action of electrons and the "firmly established" wave theory. "We are obliged," he said, "to use each theory as occasion demands and wait for further knowledge as to how it may be possible that both should be true at the same time. Toleration of opinion is a recognised virtue. The curiosity of the present situation is that opposite opinions have to be held or used by the same individual in the faith that some day the combined truth may be made plain." An excellent defence (*mutatis mutandis*) of the attitude of those who hold that omniscience and free-will cannot be reconciled on our present plane of knowledge, but are ultimately reconcilable.

My "Shaw" argument was designed to suggest the fact that a particular situation was tolerant of many interpretations and was no reason why we should despair of arriving at the correct interpretation. God gave us intelligence in order that we might reject the wrong interpretations of the Universe, yours among others, in favour of that interpretation which I am attempting to vindicate in my letters.

Thank you for reminding me of the references to prayer in Plato's *Republic*. One good turn deserves another. May I draw your attention to the following quotations from Plato's *Laws*:

"On this there follows, let us observe, this further rule, and of all rules it is the noblest and truest, that to engage in sacrifice and communion with the gods continually, by prayers and offerings and devotions of every kind, is a thing most noble and good and helpful towards the happy life" (Loeb Translation, *Laws*, vol. ii., p. 297).

To sum up. I am interested in the fact of prayer, you in the attempt to explain or explain away prayer. I think it is more important to pray than to understand how prayers are heard. No criticism of the *lex credendi* affects the fact that the *lex orandi* works. Christianity is primarily a life to be

#### A CHARGE WITHDRAWN

lived. "I had rather feel compunction," says St. Thomas à Kempis, "than know the definition of it."

I am sorry I accused you of trying to "manufacture" a religion, a not unnatural mistake, for you have written a book in which you try to forecast the future of religion, and in which you affirm the need for religion and your despair of existing religions. Chapters in that book are headed respectively, "Our Duty to God," and "Our Duty towards our Neighbour," and among other things you say: "Religion as I have defined it can rescue us from the modern impasse."

A man who asserts that religion is necessary and that religion, as he defines it, can rescue us from an impasse, must not grumble if he is accused of offering new creeds for old.

Yours ever,  
ARNOLD LUNN.



## XIV.

BROCKEN HOTEL,  
HARZ MOUNTAINS,  
GERMANY.  
*June 28th.*

DEAR LUNN,

Your letter consists of criticisms of my criticisms of your criticisms of my tenth letter, and I think that, apart from animadverting upon a growing and regrettable tendency to play your trump mystery card—see warning in my first letter—I had better leave it at that.

I, therefore, proceed to leave theology and to come to Christianity proper. I have considered the Christian hypothesis of a creative God as an explanation of the world; I now propose to consider the effects of the practice of Christianity upon the lives of human beings. You will tell me, I do not doubt, that these effects have been beneficial; you will speak of the freeing of slaves, the emancipation of women, the new equality that has arisen between man and man—all equals, are they not, in the sight of God? Against these things you will set the brutality of the Roman world; you will dilate upon the dark horror of Paganism, its contempt for human life, its pleasure in human suffering.

Some part of what you will say will be true. I am anxious, however, that you should not attribute to Christianity an improvement which is in fact due to civilisation. That the world is a better place than it was I agree; I agree, too, that human lives are brighter and freer, less oppressed by pain and suffering, less darkened by superstitious fears. That these things are so we are, I imagine, both agreed; but that Christianity should get the credit for them I am very far from admitting. The greater part of the improvement is due to the spread of knowledge, especially knowledge of natural law, which has weakened the hold of superstition on men's minds, and to the advance of science, which has conferred concrete goods, anæsthetics and cleanliness and washable underclothing upon their bodies. Not only has Christianity

not assisted this spread and contributed to this advance, but, as in a later letter I shall hope to show, it has resisted them whenever it could, persecuted those who sought to think freely and to find out facts for themselves, and denounced as impious and contrary to the will of God the discoveries and inventions to which the improvement in human life is largely due.

When I say that it is Christianity that has done these things, I mean those human beings who have been responsible for the formation and spread of Christian beliefs, the advocacy of Christian principles, and the administration of Christian power. I mean, that is to say, the various Churches which have severally proclaimed themselves as the true, the only true, repositories of the doctrine of Christ. I do not believe that in speaking and acting as they have done any one of these Churches has been announcing or even interpreting the will of God; I have, indeed, already given reasons for my view that there is no God who personally interests Himself in the affairs of the world and administers them through His representatives. Apart from this, however, I cannot help thinking that if there were, He would have adopted a kindlier view of His creatures than His self-appointed representatives have seemed inclined to take, a view not so restrictive or inimical to their pleasures. As Samuel Butler has remarked, making out the best case that he could for the alleged Almighty: "God did not allow tobacco to be discovered earlier because He knew that, if he had, St. Paul would certainly have forbidden its use."

Nor do I hold that a Church is a corporate entity having a real being, personality and will of its own, over and above the beings, the personalities and the wills of the individual human beings who compose and control it—not even about the Roman Catholic Church do I believe this. Hence, when I say that Christianity is responsible for this or that, I mean primarily the human beings or concourses of human beings who have at different times interpreted the body of doctrine which is called Christianity, and used in various ways the influence which men's belief in that doctrine has given them.

The first point that I wish to make in regard to the effect of Christianity upon men's lives, a point to which I propose

to confine this letter, follows directly from the argument of my preceding letters. In them I was concerned to show that the evidence afforded by the workings of nature and the facts of human existence contradicts the omnipotent, benevolent God hypothesis; the contradiction, I submit, is glaring. How, then, I asked, has the belief in such a Being come to be held? I attempted to answer this question by pointing out that God was a human creation expressly designed to serve human purposes. But this answer is not in itself enough; it must be supplemented with the conception of human sinfulness.

If men were good, that God should allow them to be oppressed as He does and yet be kindly is inconceivable; *ergo*, men cannot be good but wicked, and we arrive at the doctrine of sin. Sin is a specifically Christian conception. The Greeks held that evil was due to ignorance. In so far as a man knew what was good, he must, they said, pursue it; moral failure was, therefore, for them always a failure in knowledge.

Christianity reversed this conception. It is not, Christianity insists, that man does not know what is good. He does, for the good is the commandments of God, and in these he is laboriously and from his earliest years instructed. Nevertheless, knowing these commandments he transgresses them. Why? Because he is sinful. Why is he sinful? The short answer seems to be "Ask God who made him." However, I must not go into the question of God's responsibility again, and content myself with making the point that sin is not a mistake; nor is it exactly guilt. It is a seductive power in life which corrupts man's will and warps his intentions. Knowing the law, man has to decide for or against it, and in making his decision he is swayed by some dark irrational power, the power of sin, from which he has not the strength to free himself. Thus man is not the master of sin; in himself he is not strong enough to subdue it, owing to the weakness of his flesh. God alone can help and give him strength to overcome its evil power. And when God does not choose to help, then man sins, sins and suffers. For, although man cannot of himself withstand sin, he must himself pay the penalty for not withstanding it, and the wages of sin is suffering.

## EFFECTS OF BELIEF IN "SIN"

Thus man is made to suffer for something which he cannot control; he sins through the refusal of God to give him strength to overcome sin. And, because God does refuse, refuse considerably and over long periods, man sins and suffers. And not the least of his suffering is remorse, remorse for doing that which he had not the strength to refrain from doing.

Now this Christian doctrine of sin, suffering, and remorse has been responsible for an incalculable amount of avoidable human misery. It has led men to regard their bodies as wicked, their desires as temptations to wrong, and their natural instincts as snares of the devil. It has led them to try to suppress their wishes and to deny their desires; it has caused them to undergo terrifying moral conflicts in the effort to do these things, and, when they have proved unsuccessful, it has led them to torture themselves with remorse.

Consider, for example, the tale of human suffering and degradation resulting from the asceticism which under the influence of this doctrine men have considered it their duty to practise in order to please God; the horrible things they have done to their bodies. For about two centuries the hideous maceration of the body was regarded as the highest proof of human excellence. From Lecky's famous account in the *History of European Morals* I take a few examples at random. St. Jerome speaks with admiration of a hermit who lived exclusively for thirty years on a small portion of barley bread and of muddy water, of another who lived in a hole and never ate more than five figs for his daily repast for six months. Macarius of Alexandria slept in a marsh and exposed his body naked to the stings of flies; he also carried about with him eighty pounds of iron. St. Sabinus would only eat corn that had become rotten by remaining for a month in water; St. Besarion spent forty days and nights in the middle of a thorn bush and for forty years never lay down when he slept.

The cleanliness of the body was regarded as the pollution of the soul—the body, you understand, being wicked—and many of the saints—St. Anthony, for example, and St. Abraham—lived for over fifty years without washing. "Our fathers," said the Abbot Alexandria, looking wistfully back

to the past, "never washed their faces, but we frequent the public baths." Many "disdained all clothes, and crawled abroad like wild beasts, covered only by their matted hair."<sup>1</sup> It is in the same vein that we are told that St. Ammon had never seen himself naked. As with the body, so with the natural affections. With many of the hermits it was a rule never to look upon the face of any woman, and the number of years they had escaped this contamination was commonly stated as a conspicuous proof of their excellence. St. Basil, we are told, "would only speak to a woman under extreme necessity."<sup>2</sup>

The story of Mutius, which I propose to recount to you in Lecky's own words, is typical of many. "A man named Mutius, accompanied by his only child, a little boy of eight years old, abandoned his possessions and demanded admission into a monastery. The monks received him, but they proceeded to discipline his heart. 'He had already forgotten that he was rich; he must next be taught to forget that he was a father.' His little child was separated from him, clothed in dirty rags, subjected to every form of gross and wanton hardship, beaten, spurned, and ill-treated. Day after day the father was compelled to look upon his boy wasting away with sorrow, his once happy countenance for ever stained with tears, distorted by sobs of anguish. But yet, says the admiring biographer, 'though he saw this day by day, such was his love for Christ, and for the virtue of obedience, that the father's heart was rigid and unmoved. He thought little of the tears of his child. He was anxious only for his own humility and perfection in virtue.' At last the abbot told him to take his child and throw it into the river. He proceeded without a murmur or apparent pang to obey, and it was only at the last moment that the monks interposed, and on the very brink of the river saved the child. Mutius afterwards rose to a high position among the ascetics, and was justly regarded as having displayed in great perfection the temper of a saint."<sup>3</sup>

You will tell me that these are extreme cases, and that it is not fair to judge the effect of Christianity on men's lives be-

<sup>1</sup> Lecky, *History of European Morals* vol. ii, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

cause it turned the heads of the saints. But the matter is by no means so easily to be disposed of.

First, the number of persons who behaved in this remarkable way was very considerable. Lecky, quoting a formidable array of authorities, gives it as running into tens of thousands. Towards the close of the fourth century in Egypt alone the monastic population was nearly equal in numbers to the population of the cities. Secondly, it must be remembered that the ascetic life was an ideal to which most Christians aspired, even when they had not the hardihood to realise their ideal. St. Simon Stylites, who replaced the worms that dropped from the sores on his body, lived on a pillar for thirty years and on one leg for twelve, was universally pronounced to be the highest model of a Christian saint. The Christian mythology which grew up spontaneously from this time onwards and constituted for many centuries the popular literature of Christendom has always reserved its greatest veneration for the ascetic, the saint and the hermit. Thirdly, the mortification of the flesh is a perfectly logical outcome of the Christian doctrine of sin. Sin is conceived to be so transcendently dreadful as to bear no proportionable relation to any earthly graces, pursuits, or interests. To avoid sin anything is permissible: ignorance, misery, squalor, the neglect of the simplest human duties, contempt for the most obvious human affections. It is through the body that we sin. Very well, then, the body must be chastised, and so, to quote Lecky's famous summary, "a hideous, sordid, and emaciated maniac, without knowledge, without patriotism, without natural affection, passing his life in a long routine of useless and atrocious self-torture, and quailing before the ghastly phantoms of his delirious brain, became the ideal of the nations which had known the writings of Plato and Cicero and the lives of Socrates and Cato."<sup>1</sup>

And this, mark you, was the work of Christianity. For the Greek ideal of the developed human being living a full, free and vigorous life with all his energies utilised and all his faculties trained to concert pitch, it deliberately substituted this mutilated travesty of a man.

All through the ages this dreadful ideal has overshadowed

<sup>1</sup> Lecky, *History of European Morals*, vol. ii, p. 46.

the lives of men. It is still potent in the Middle Ages. Do you remember that profoundly affecting scene at the close of the *Cloister and the Hearth*, where Gerard, tricked into priesthood by a false report of Margaret's death, is visited by her in his hermit's cave, declares her a figment of the devil sent to allure and seduce him, and drives from him with obscene denunciations the broken-hearted woman for whom every starved instinct in his nature cries out? That scene, indeed the whole of the second half of that admirable book, caused me as a young man to feel for the Catholic Church and all that it represented an antipathy which I have never altogether outlived.

In the nineteenth century the tradition still persists; in fact, in some ways it is stronger than ever, and is responsible for those frightful moral conflicts, those agonised strivings, that brooding remorse, with which the Victorians tormented themselves. The lives of most Victorians bear witness to a constant conflict between the forces of good and evil, an everlasting struggle against sin. A formidable moral apparatus which, thank heaven, is in me and, so far as I can see, in most of my contemporaries almost entirely lacking, was brought by them to bear upon the business of life. Continuously the Victorian experiences temptation, fights against and overcomes it with a consequent strengthening of moral fibre, or fights against it and succumbs with a consequent lowering of moral tone and—until he is too far gone in sin to mind—remorse. Life is set with moral pitfalls, and it is only by the exercise of unremitting vigilance and iron restraint that destruction is avoided. "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done," chanted the Victorians unctuously, "And there is no health in us." What a miserable, snivelling attitude for a man to take up towards life! "I have 'left undone those things which' I 'ought to have done'; and I 'have done those things which' I 'ought not to have done'—and I am very well, thank you," replies Butler. I thoroughly agree with him.

Even the emancipated Victorians were unable to win free of the influences of their upbringing; they cannot divest themselves of a morbid preoccupation with sin, even when

they have put formal Christianity behind them. Take, for example, the following passage from Mark Rutherford, a sceptic and a rebel, a harbinger of the Shaws and Wellses who were to come:—"Do not those of us, who have been mercifully prevented from damning ourselves before the whole world, who have succeeded and triumphed—do we not know, know as we know hardly anything else, that our success and our triumph were due to the superiority in strength by just a grain, no more, of our better self over the raging rebellion beneath it? It was just a tremble of the tongue of the balance: it might have gone this way, or it might have gone the other, but by God's grace it was this way settled—God's grace, as surely, in some form of words everybody must acknowledge it to have been."

The passage is from *Catherine Furze*, and records the moral triumph of the heroine in abstaining from making love to a married clergyman. A little further on there is a sermon about a Roman sculptor who is later converted to Christianity. He is an artist and a pagan, so naturally he has affairs with loose women; but, although he is only a pagan artist, the wheels of his moral machinery are made to rotate as effectively and as uncomfortably as if he were a Christian clergyman. Having succumbed to temptation, he is so overcome with remorse that he is unable to make statues. "Thus it came to pass that after a fall, when he went back to his work, it was so unreal to him, such a mockery, that days often elapsed before he could do anything." The passages are typical; they might have occurred in any serious Victorian novel.

Now what I am asking you to consider is the immense sum of human suffering that this peculiar mentality, this specifically Christian mentality, has entailed. Think of it as something going on all through the ages. Christianity introduces a violent division within the soul born of the opposition between the obligations of the Christian ethic and the promptings of the natural desires. Because of this opposition men and women have gone through life harried and puzzled and tormented. They have been torn by struggle and weakened by conflict, struggle of the most intense, conflict of the most wearing description. It is difficult to know whether to pity the



Christian struggling against temptation the more for victory or defeat. Victory means the frustration of natural desire, the stifling of natural impulse; defeat means moral humiliation, the gnawing of remorse, the taking of fresh resolves and building up of fresh resistances. Thus under the influence of Christianity the human soul has become a battle-ground of conflicting emotions. Whichever side wins, the personality is maimed and mutilated by the suppression of the defeated part. Thus human beings go through life not as whole men and women facing the chances and changes of existence with undivided energies in pursuit of consistently desired ends, but distracted by inward conflict, fluctuating between a shaming indulgence and an enfeebling self-denial.

This is what Christianity has meant for the lay multitude of men and women; for the few professionals it has meant more, how much more only the walls of cells in monastery and convent could tell. I have shown you a glimpse of what asceticism means in those hideous lives of the saints and hermits from which I have quoted extracts. But the saints and hermits were only the extreme examples of the ideal type to which all Christians aspire, and for nearly two thousand years there has flowed through the monasteries and nunneries a continuous stream of fresh aspirants after the ideal.

Frankly conventual life and all that it implies fill me with horror. It is not often that I find myself in agreement with an Anglican Bishop, but I cannot too heartily endorse the recent strictures of the Bishop of Exeter on the monastic life. While recognising that it may be right for a particular human being to maintain throughout his life "the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty, one needs," he went on, "no imagination to picture the suffering and scandals to which those vows give rise." It is so unlikely that I shall ever again enjoy the opportunity of quoting an English Bishop with approval, that I cannot deny myself the rare pleasure of favouring you with some of his remarks:

"The young girl of eighteen, filled with the elation characteristic of a religious crisis, becomes a novice. For some years her life is not unhappy. Then perhaps overstrain, and

## EVILS OF MONASTICISM

the long silence, and retreats spent sometimes in solitude, destroy her balance of judgment.

The natural uprisings of human desires are translated by her confessor to be the instigations of the devil to make her renounce her high ideals.

Later on comes that period of terrible revulsion.

Her heart yearns for the children she was intended by God to bear. Every crying child raises in her heart the most agonised feelings of regret, and what she thinks such a mortal sin adds to the torment which she is daily suffering.

No prisoner in any of our convict prisons suffers as that poor woman suffers. Hell with all its horrors yawns before her. She crushes her natural instincts, but suffers unbelievable pain in so doing.

If we turn to the monastery, the picture is even darker. A long record of abnormalities which have been developed by men almost maddened by segregation cannot be put aside.

And even if the control is so complete that the body does not sin, does not the mind break loose so that the religious life is that of the Whited Sepulchre—outside is all that is good, inside all that is vile and corrupt?"

From what I have learned of the monastic life from reading and conversation the Bishop's picture appears to be in no way overdone. I have the more pleasure in presenting you with it in view of the growing tendency which I have noticed in your recent letters, to abandon the compromise of Anglicanism in despair and to retire within the inner citadel of Catholicism. That Catholicism is easier to defend on the logical side than Anglicanism I agree. Morally its doctrines are, I think, the more hateful. It has produced monasteries and hell; it has availed itself of torture on a hitherto undreamed-of scale. Its contributions in these departments I reserve for my next letter.

Yours ever,  
C. E. M. JOAD.

XV.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
KENT.  
*July 4th.*

DEAR JOAD,

To confess that my mind, like yours, is incompetent to solve the riddle of the Universe is a very different thing from playing the trump card of mystery. I am a modest agnostic who believes that he can prove by reason that God has revealed a few saving truths, but who makes no claim to provide a satisfactory solution to ultimate mysteries. Is there anything irrational in this position?

I am anxious that you should meet my case fairly and not evade or misrepresent what I regard as a fundamental part of my case, the necessity for admitting the limits of the human mind in the discussion of ultimates. Will you therefore kindly devote your next letter to this point and to other points raised in this letter, and postpone your further attack till we have cleared away these misconceptions?

I expect an answer to the following questions:

(1) If God exists, as you seem to believe, is it rational to suppose that the finite mind can possibly frame a theology which shall be entirely free from unsolved mysteries or apparent contradictions?

(2) I have quoted several cases of apparent contradictions in the attempts of scientists or philosophers, such as yourself, to explain ultimate reality. Why do you not accuse scientists and philosophers in general of playing the trump card of mystery? Surely a certain tempered agnosticism with regard to ultimate riddles is not only rational, but the only possible attitude for a man who retains a vestige of modesty about his own intellectual powers? If you were defending your philosophy instead of attacking mine, you would need a hand composed exclusively of trumps.

And now for your letter about monasticism. By way of preface let me reassure you as to my personal tendencies.

## THE CHRISTIAN PREMISS

Every Anglican recites the Creed, and thereby affirms his belief in the Catholic Church. We are not concerned in these letters with the difference between Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism, but with those Catholic doctrines that are the common heritage of Rome and Canterbury. You have no right to suggest that I have abandoned the compromise of Anglicanism in despair merely because I am prepared to defend the central doctrines of Catholicism by arguments which would, I hope, be accepted as orthodox both by Anglicans and by Roman Catholics.

I must reluctantly refuse, for reasons of space, to discuss many points in your letter, notably your travesty of the Catholic doctrine on the relations of God to the sinner. Your letter, as a whole, might be summed up not unfairly as an attempt to prove that Catholic conclusions cannot be deduced from humanist premisses.

The humanist argues from the premiss that this life is all, and that our supreme concern should therefore be to avoid pain, poverty and discomfort.

The Christian argues from the premiss that life is a preparation for eternity, and that humanist values are unimportant compared to eternal values.

The Christian conclusion is only absurd if you reject the Christian premiss, a premiss for which, as I hope to show, an extremely good philosophic and historical case can be established.

If eternal life is a reality, and if, as is not improbable, our happiness in eternal life depends on our behaviour in this life, eternal values are necessarily infinitely more important than human values, the salvation of one's soul than comfort or health or riches.

Your difficulty is mainly due to defective imagination. You cannot make the imaginative effort necessary to see the world through the eye of a Christian. You can state, with more eloquence perhaps than accuracy, the main outlines of Christian teaching on the relations between human and eternal values, but it is clear that you feel that the mere statement of so monstrous a doctrine carries its own refutation.

Now it is my business to prove that Christ did rise from the dead, and my proof should precede the discussion of

monasticism. But, as you have introduced the subject, I shall try to prove that monasticism is an integral part of Christianity, that the great monastic orders have made a notable contribution to culture, and that the supernatural happiness of the cloister compares very favourably with the natural happiness of secular life.

I must begin by insisting that the Church has never tried to transform the average man into the monk, for the Church realises that it is only the exceptional man who has a vocation for the monastic life.

Nor does Catholicism, the great enemy of Puritanism, frown on natural happiness, but sets first things first. The Christian hedonist realises that eternal happiness is more important than temporal happiness, but Catholicism does not forbid the search for temporal happiness provided that eternal happiness is not risked thereby. It is a gross libel on Catholicism to suggest, as you do, that Catholicism "has led men to regard their bodies as wicked, their desires as temptations to wrong, and their natural instincts as snares of the devil." This is rhetoric, but not reasoning. Catholicism is distinguished for sanity and for balance. It may interest you to know that the Mediæval Inquisition was founded very largely to suppress the Cathari, who held views similar to those which you attribute to Catholics, and certainly did regard "their bodies as wicked, their desires as temptations to wrong, and their natural instincts as snares of the devil." These heretics even condemned sexual intercourse between husband and wife.

The Church regards the saint as the ideal Christian, but recognises the fact that the ascetic and monastic ideal is for exceptional souls, and that a married man may live a full, complete, Christian, and even saintly life in the world.

Now a doctrine may appeal to the head and yet leave the heart untouched. An academic belief in the supernatural is very different from a living faith.

The average Christian throughout the ages has always found it very difficult to believe in the supernatural as he believes, say, that fire burns. He lives in this world, and is only too tempted to forget the reality of the next world. That is why faith is a virtue, for faith is not merely an assent to

a chain of rational propositions, but is a belief supported by an act of will, an act which has to be continually renewed in face of the plausible suggestions of scepticism.

All Christians pay lip service to the theory that the values of this world are unimportant compared with the values of the next world, but it is only the exceptional Christian who really acts as if he believed that a good income or a seat in the Cabinet or brilliant success as a novelist or a century in a Test Match were matters of complete and utter insignificance compared with eternal values. A Christian therefore requires to have his attention constantly redirected to the supernatural, and to be incessantly reminded that the values of the world are ephemeral. The justification of St. Simon Stylites is the fact that he was a first-class advertisement of the supernatural in an age which had not yet discovered modern methods of advertising.

Think of the people who have glanced up at that lonely pillar as they hurried past on their way to work. The young man on his way to his office, wondering whether he would get a rise in salary; the ambitious parvenu, wondering whether he would bring off that marriage with the daughter of a great patrician; the rhetorician muttering the last few sentences of the speech which was to bring him fame; the rising young politician. I do not suppose that St. Simon had more than a fleeting effect on the vast majority of those who saw him, but some at least must have been recalled from their exclusive concentration on the affairs of this world to the thought of the next world. It was well worth while for one man to spend his entire life on the top of a pillar if he thereby saved not only his own soul, but the soul of a single sinner from eternal punishment.

You don't believe this, but you must, if you are logical, admit that this view is a rational deduction from Christian premisses. If you, for instance, were converted by these letters to a potent belief in the supernatural and to a saintly horror of sin, and determined, as an act of penitence, to spend the rest of your life in a state of semi-nudity on the summit of Nelson's Column, the result could hardly fail to edify those young admirers of yours who had been so sadly misled by your books. I fear, however, that the police would interfere,

for in England we discourage the supernatural from getting out of hand.

To descend from the general to the particular, let me set beside the passage which you quote from Lecky the more balanced judgment of Henri Bremond of the French Academy in his introduction to that admirable book, *Les Pères du Désert*, by Jean Bremond. "The peopling of the desert," he writes, "by ascetics and doctors of asceticism is a unique episode in the story of morals. Those who refuse to recognise the evidence of a new force are driven to mutually contradictory explanations. By isolating and exaggerating" (as Lecky does), "or by generalising from certain violences and extravagances (*certaines violences ou bizarreries*) of the desert fathers, they have attempted to justify the accusation that ascetics violated the harmonious laws and the happy equilibrium which classic wisdom had established. . . . These hermits enjoyed a reputation which no chair of philosophy and no university, however powerful, has enjoyed. Popular, in the proper sense of that term, they devoted themselves to providing elevated instruction for simple souls, and to initiating into the secrets of the most severe discipline the favourites of fortune. Their influence knew no frontiers, cultural or social. . . . *Docetur ambulando*; they elaborated by their lives the moral philosophy which scholars were one day to construct. With a minimum of formulæ and with great ease and suppleness, they exposed the guiding principle of their lives and the practical and sublime wisdom which is implicit in their sanctity."

I wish you would read *What Are Saints?* a book based on Father Martindale's broadcast talks, talks which were intended not for specialists, but for people like you who had no leisure to read solid works on the subject. Here is an extract from his charming essay on the greatest of these desert saints, St. Anthony of Egypt:

"Anthony died in 356, aged a hundred and five years, his sight and hearing unimpaired, and all his teeth sound in his head. His was a personality sublime, yet sane: commanding, colossal, yet simple, shrewd, drily humorous and affectionate, even tender; able to converse with politicians and

philosophers, judges and generals, yet to make friends with the average man of market-place and shop. His will-power was tremendous, yet *controlled*, and never bursting forth into mere tyranny; his intelligence, accurate; his vision, sublime; yet never wild, never fanatical. This *hermit* was the most 'sociable,' most 'clubbable,' of men. What, then, is self-advertisement? He used none of it, and yet seems as familiar to me as any aged man that I honour has been. And what is money? He got rid of his, yet built a memorial as lasting as the Pyramids, more meaningful than they. For who is grateful to, who now does homage to, the builders of those colossal excrescences of stone? What is position, social or political? He sought neither—and which of the politicians or even Emperors of his day, let alone financiers, means anything to us—is doing anything active now? But Anthony is active still."

I am not prepared to justify all the extravagances of devotion attributed to these desert monks. Nor is the Church. The Church is a balance in which common sense is always weighted against extravagance.

The Père de Ravignan, a famous Notre Dame preacher, was once asked to visit a holy nun who was in a state of complete ecstasy. Indeed, she was levitated with her feet off the ground. De Ravignan looked at her and said: "What large feet she has!" whereupon the nun came out of ecstasy and was very cross. "You have not advanced far in holiness," said de Ravignan, "levitation or no, if you cannot stand a few words of dispraise." A characteristic instance of common sense restraining extravagance.

As to your story about Mutius and his child, what does this prove? Had the monks who behaved so cruelly to his child been instructed by a competent moral theologian they would have avoided the grave sin of encouraging a father to disregard his natural duties to his child. A Church which is attacked by the moderns for her undue emphasis on the sacramental element in family life, and for her refusal to countenance the breaking up of the family by divorce, cannot consistently be attacked because a few eccentric monks acted in complete defiance of the Church's teaching about



family obligations. The first question which a Catholic is asked if he wishes to join a Religious Order is, "Have you any parents or relations dependent on you?" and if the answer is in the affirmative he is not admitted. It sometimes happens that a novice is admitted and that, years later, his parents fall into poverty. In such cases it is very common for the Order to contribute to their support. So much for your charge against the Church for encouraging men to "neglect the simplest human duties," and to show contempt for "the most obvious human affection."

By the way, would you be prepared to accept as a reliable witness to facts the author of *De Cœnobiorum Institutis*, the work from which Lecky extracted the story about Mutius? Please answer this question.

At this point you may ask what good did these hermits do by living in the desert and by concentrating selfishly on the salvation of their souls. I have quoted Bremond's testimony to their profound effect on all classes, and I need not re-state my view that any body of men who bear steady witness to the reality of the supernatural are performing a far more valuable social service than many philanthropists, some of whom at least are mere self-advertising busybodies. (It is odd, by the way, that a bachelor who spends his life trying to lower his handicap at golf is rarely reproached for selfishness, for modern critics only begin to get excited about selfishness of the spiritual variety.) Finally these monks of the desert placed the world under an incalculable debt, for it was their lives that inspired St. Benedict to found that great order which helped to save European civilisation. Historians of all creeds and of none unite in their tribute to the monastic orders who kept alive the torch of culture during the turbulent confusion of the Dark Ages.

Dom Cuthbert Butler, in his classic study of *Benedictine Monasticism*, the accuracy of which is praised by Mr. Coulton, a severe judge, quotes from the Preface by the late Professor J. S. Brewer, who was not a Catholic, to the edition of Giraldus Cambrensis in the Rolls Series:

"Christianity, as exhibited to the rude Anglo-Saxon, was exhibited also in practical lessons of life, co-operation, and

free labour—of perfect obedience, order, regularity, economy, with all the wondrous results of which monasticism was the type and the example. If men know how to farm and to drain and till the land scientifically; if they know how colleges may be built and large households maintained without confusion; if they have learned to value economy, punctuality, and dispatch; nay more, if the minor obligations of social life, the unwritten laws of natural respect, good breeding, and politeness have grown up amongst men, these all were derived from the monasteries; for their discipline reached from the highest to the lowliest duties of man, as if all were bound together in one indissoluble union. It allowed no fervour of devotion to be pleaded as excuse for neglect or waste or untidiness; no urgency of labour as a set-off for want of punctuality; no genius or skill or rank as an exemption from the tribute of respect, consideration, and kindness that is due to others. The broken fragments of their frugal meal were as carefully gathered up to be given to the poor, their clothes washed, mended, and put away, their kitchen utensils and linen, their spades and implements of husbandry, kept in as trim order and ready for use, as if their spiritual advancement had exclusively depended upon these things. We recognise the value of such habits now. Waste, dirt, and irregularity are as great enemies to virtue now as they were then, and no less mischievous. But the lesson familiar to us all was new to our forefathers, and therefore the more impressive to men accustomed to waste and disorder, the most inveterate evils of savage and uncivilised life. The court, the great lord and landowner, the universities, the city company, the merchant with his ledger, the farmer, the architect, the artist, the musician, and the author, owe just so much to the monk as is the difference between the rude untutored efforts of the savage and the disciplined and developed powers of cultivated genius, energy, taste, and imagination. Nor were all forms of manual labour, in a lower degree, without their obligations to monasticism. The stone-mason, the jeweller, the worker in brass and iron, the carver of wood, the joiner, the glass-maker, the weaver and embroiderer, the maltster, the brewer, and the banker, even the hedger, the ditcher, and the gardener,

learned each the lesson of this peculiar craft from these societies of well-bred and educated men, who took their turn at the trowel or the dung-cart, and were deft and skilful alike in the kitchen, the brew-house and the bakehouse, in the workshop, and in the field, as they were in illuminating manuscripts, in choral music, in staining a glass window, or erecting a campanile. Talk, indeed, of the aristocracy of labour! Why, the very notion of such a thing was as inconceivable to the old world as it would have been to us, but for the disciples of St. Benedict. . . . If the monks feasted on gaudy or memorial days, the poor feasted also. If they doubled their dishes and their pittances, the poor shared the luxury. . . . Without the monasteries a country life would have presented to men, especially to the labourer, one dreary round of unalloyed and hopeless drudgery; of fasting days without festivals, of work without mirth or holidays."

You have told me that it is to science we owe our ideas of cleanliness. You are wrong: it was, as Professor Brewer has pointed out, the monks who were the first great enemies of "waste, dirt, and irregularity."

I could say a great deal more, if space permitted, about the services of the monasteries to culture by preserving and by copying the priceless manuscripts that they had saved, and by persuading the barbarians among whom they settled to adopt Roman laws and customs, Roman art and civilisation. Your attitude to monasticism is unbalanced because your imagination cannot leap the barrier of your own personal distaste for a system in which you would be unhappy. But the important question is not whether conventual life fills you with horror, but whether it fills monks and nuns with horror. Clearly your kind of life and mine would have filled St. Anthony with horror, but that, in itself, is no argument against your ideas of pleasure.

Surely it is irrational to suppose that monasticism would have survived for all these centuries unless it had satisfied some deep-seated human need. There are to-day more monks in England than before the Reformation. I admit that there are unhappy monks and nuns, but what does that prove? Unhappy marriages and divorces are no argument against

marriage, and unhappy nuns and nuns who break their vows are no argument against the conventual system.

Again, there is no possibility of what might be described as a precipitate spiritual marriage. A girl can meet a man on Monday, accept him on Tuesday and marry him on Wednesday, but long years pass before the nun takes the final vows. The Jesuit does not take his final vows for periods often as much as fifteen years, by which time he should be in no doubt as to whether he has a genuine vocation.

Monasticism has survived because there is more happiness to the square inch in monasteries than to the square yard in the world outside. "I was travelling," writes Father Knox, "not long since with a Benedictine (not the kind you mean) who was accosted by a porter whom he had asked a simple question with the remark, 'Excuse my mentioning it, sir, but we don't often get a smile nowadays.' The smile in question is about 1,500 years old."

Your Anglican Bishop seems to have forgotten that convents are not the only places in which you will find women "whose heart yearns for the children" that they have never borne. And his attack on nunneries would serve equally well as a preface to a tract demanding the revival of polygamy in order to provide the surplus feminine population with husbands. It is interesting, by the way, that you should frankly admit that your antipathy for the Catholic Church was originally derived not from facts, but from fiction—that is, from an invented scene in the work of a Protestant novelist.

And now for the problem of Mr. Joad's conscience, its cause and cure. Your views on conscience are the result of an emotional reaction against Victorianism rather than of a reasoned survey of the facts. You do not really believe that sin is an illusion and regret for sin a folly. If, in a moment of cowardice, you rushed out of a burning house and left your daughter to die in the flames, you would feel remorse to your dying day. You wax very indignant with the monks for their callous attitude to Mutius and his son. Were the monks "wrong," and, if so, what do you mean by "wrong"? Should one feel regret when one has done "wrong," or is it, in your view, a mistake to do wrong, but foolish to regret

doing wrong? You attack the Church, unjustly of course, for encouraging people to "neglect the simplest human duties." Is it a sin to neglect human duties, and should those who commit this sin feel remorse? The fervour of your moral indignation when you attack the Church is irrational unless you feel that the Church sinned in promoting the Inquisition and that those who sinned—Torquemada, for instance—should feel regret in so far as they have done the things which they ought not to have done and have left undone the things which they ought to have done. Or do you mean to imply that it is rational to feel remorse for a breach of the humanist's code, but irrational to feel remorse for a breach of the Christian code?

Would you condemn as "a miserable snivelling attitude" the remorse which a man might feel who had betrayed his best friend? Nobody could read your autobiography without realising that your conscience is sensitive on many points. You have a passionate hatred for war and cruelty and would feel great remorse if, in a moment of moral cowardice, you deserted the causes which you have so much at heart. You have your ideals and you try to live up to them. Why this smug attitude towards those who try to live up to ideals which do not happen to appeal to you?

Your real point is that our attitude to sexual irregularities has changed in recent years. I agree. We are gradually becoming sin-blind. Nor, in this respect, am I setting myself up on a pedestal. Things which ought to shock me no longer shock me, but I differ from you in that I do not regard this sin-blindness as a cause for smug self-satisfaction. I know that if I could look at my past life with the eyes of a Saint and with the Saint's vivid understanding of the real horror of sin, I should join you on the top of Nelson's column. We should make a pretty pair. I am, you will understand, not laying claim to a romantic past, but am merely ranging myself among those who, like yourself, do not bother very much about their past misdeeds.

Our changing attitude to sexual irregularities is very largely due to vanity. The Victorian who seduced a virgin felt, as you say, an occasional twinge of conscience. The modern prophet seduces a virgin on Monday and on Tuesday

preaches a lay sermon to advanced thinkers on the march of progress and on the modern enlightenment of those who had shed the Victorian inhibition against seducing virgins, the sort of sermon which ought to end by ascribing as is most justly due to Almighty Evolution all Honour, Might, Majesty, Dominion, and Power. Amen.

Our ancestors realised that it was all but impossible to practise what they preached, but, at least, they avoided the supreme hypocrisy of preaching what they practised.

I am unimpressed by Samuel Butler's variation of the General Confession. "I have left undone those things which I ought to have done and I am very well, thank you." I am unimpressed because I am not deceived by Butler's cynical pose. He was, as you must know, an incurable sentimentalist. He spent a small fortune on a young barrister and got nothing in return, neither affection nor even common civility. This was followed by a platonic cult for a Swiss commercial traveller. Here is an extract from a letter to his beloved "Hans":

"Then, my dear Hans, let me beseech you in the name of all the affection a dear father can bear to a very dear son, by the absurd, idiotic tears that you have wrung from me, by those we wrung from yourself, by the love which Jones bears you and which you bear towards him—if these things will not prevail with you nothing will—apply to me, and do so without delay in whatever way will ensure your getting the answer quickest which you will immediately receive—I mean *draw on me at once for your passage money and necessary expenses* and come home."

Butler was very sardonic about hymns, but Hans inspired him to try his hand at hymnology. I do not think that Butler's hymn, "Take him into thy holy keeping, Lord," is a notable addition to this branch of literature. One more extract before I have done with your favourite modern cynic:

"Yesterday Alfred was teasing me when I was busy, and I spoke a little sharply. Then, immediately remembering, I said:

“ ‘My dear Alfred, if I ever speak crossly like that please to say “Hans” at once and it will stop me. Hans was never cross and that was why we were so fond of him.’

“Alfred said: ‘Well, Sir, I am sure Hans would not like it if he was to hear you speaking cross to me.’

“I answered: ‘Of course he would not, my dear Alfred, and that is why I want you to say “Hans” at once.’

“You see, it is just this. If the having known you makes me, as it ought to do, less irritable and more forbearing, then, no matter how far off you are, you are within me; I have got something of yourself, and I shall know that it was not all humbug, but that I really did understand and love you. Whereas if I am no less irritable than before, then I shall know that I never understood you or loved you truly. And this shall hardly be.”

The balance and poise of Catholicism, which has always acted as a check on sentimentalism, would have provided Butler, who was secretly very much attracted by Catholicism, with a healthy outlet for his emotions, and we should have been spared the nauseating pietism of his Hans fixation.

Butler, who was so amusingly sardonic about the love of God, was intensely serious about his love for Hans. The man who laughed at the General Confession urges his valet Alfred to rebuke him in the holy name of Hans for his lapses from grace.

I have a very sincere admiration for Butler’s wayward genius, but if you wish to use him as a stick with which to beat Christians, you must select a victim who cannot call that particular bluff.

Butler is the typical modern cynic. In other words, he is the typical modern sentimentalist. He has diverted his sentiment into unworthy channels. A melancholy exile from the Church, the natural home of the whole human race, he hunts about desperately for some substitute for the sacrament of penance, and satisfies his spiritual needs with the happy combination of a valet and a commercial traveller.

You, like Butler, make a great parade of being the cheery cynic who has got rid of conscience and other troublesome Victorian inhibitions, but you give yourself away badly in

your unguarded moments. In your book, *The Present and Future of Religion*, you write as follows: "Civilisation, it is clear, needs the practical application of the teaching of Christ as never before. It will crash, and deservedly crash, unless it tries Christianity before it is too late." And this, mark you, from the man who is now trying to show that Christianity is inimical to the health and happiness of mankind.

You cannot escape by contrasting Christianity with the behaviour of Christians, for nobody denies that Christians fail to live up to the Christian code. But do you really believe, whatever you may say, that the younger generation are happier than their Christian grandfathers? According to you, the slump in Christianity should have increased the sum total of human happiness; that it has failed to do so is clear on your own showing. "Religious belief," you write, "is rapidly and palpably on the decline. Young people in particular are either indifferent to religion or hostile to it. For the first time in history there is coming to maturity a generation of men and women who have no religion, and feel no need for one. They are content to ignore it. Also they are very unhappy, and the suicide rate is abnormally high."

You are anxious that civilisation alone should get the credit for those great reforms which we attribute to the influence of Christ. But if civilisation owes nothing to Christianity it is a little difficult to understand why you should hold that "civilisation needs the practical application of the teaching of Christ as never before." I look forward with sympathy to the efforts which you will make in your next letter to reconcile your main thesis, the thesis that Christianity is inimical to the health and happiness of mankind with the fact, which you have observed and recorded, that the decline of Christianity coincides with an increase of unhappiness among the younger generation and with an abnormal rise in the suicide rate.

May I suggest that you should play "the trump card of mystery" to reconcile these contradictions?

Yours ever,  
ARNOLD LUNN.



## XVI.

4, EAST HEATH ROAD,  
HAMPSTEAD, N.W. 3.  
7th July, 1932.

DEAR LUNN,

You ask for an answer to two questions: (1) If God exists, is it rational to suppose that a finite mind can give a complete and consistent account of him? (2) Why do I not accuse scientists and philosophers of playing "the mystery card," since they also contradict themselves and fail in understanding?

Again, at the end of your letter you describe yourself as looking forward to my attempt to reconcile my view that the effects of Christianity have been prejudicial to human happiness with my assertion that the decline of Christianity has coincided with an increase of unhappiness.

I am sorry to disappoint you, but you will have to wait. I have already too often interrupted the continuing statement of my positive case to answer you, and I must refuse to do it any more. I can't write about everything at once, and if I turn this way and that to defend myself against every "pot-shot" you choose to discharge at me, I should never get to the end of my journey. Were it not that I am convinced of your sincerity, I should believe you were deliberately trying to make me botch my statement by continual digression from its theme; knowing that this is not the case, I impute to honest zeal what I should otherwise have attributed to dishonest dialectic.

But the pleasure you expect to derive from my replies is, I hope, only postponed. I shall make my answer when my turn for answering comes, that is to say, in the second half, when the distinction between dogmatic theology which asserts, and science and philosophy which suggests, shall be made plain to you.<sup>1</sup> Briefly it is, that while all three are

Unfortunately this is never done. Lack of space prevented me from enlightening Lunn.—C. E. M. J.

ignorant, the first supplies the place of knowledge by converting its conjectures into dogmas, the second and third put forward hypotheses which they are prepared to revise and to withdraw. You shall also be instructed in the nature of the benefits conferred by the holding of some creed, *provided that it is not too strongly held*, upon those who, unable to live without spiritual props, need to veil the stark outlines of reality.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, let me assure you that the fact that I do not answer you now does not mean either that I make light of your arguments in the present or propose to ignore them in the future.

I continue my tale of the unhappiness caused by Christianity. I have spoken of the Christian doctrine of sin and the mortifications of the flesh which, under its influence, Christians have felt it their duty to undertake. I would not have you infer, as at times you seem to do, from my strictures on this doctrine and its consequences, that I am a hedonist who believes that happiness is the only good, or a libertine who believes that the gratification of the senses is the only or even the chief means to happiness. You have done me the honour of reading enough of my philosophical writings to know already that I harbour no such delusions. My ideal of conduct is rather the Greek doctrine of the Mean. I would, that is to say, accord to passion, to intellect and to sense each their share in the good life, while refusing to concede to any a supremacy over the rest. Yet, in the act of saying so, I must admit that the very fact that I advocate such a doctrine as reasonable, involves an implicit admission of the supremacy of the reason; that I should seek to apply it to life, an admission of the legitimacy of restraint. But the restraint whose legitimacy I concede is exercised always in the interests of the whole; its object is to ensure that no part of our nature may be starved or stifled by over-development of another. And my quarrel with the Christian ethic is just that the restraints which it advocates are in the interests not of the whole but of a part; hence, they do not so much further life as cripple it, and they do this because, for Christianity, life is an object of suspicion and dislike.

<sup>1</sup> This instruction, alas! is also never given.—C. E. M. J.

Again, that mankind has an impulse to self-denial I do not wish to deny. Properly controlled this impulse is an instrument of value, since without denial nothing of value can be achieved. But, if Christianity is right, the impulse possesses a privileged position, which entitles it to unlimited indulgence. "Deny all your impulses," the Christian seems to say, "except the impulse to self-denial"; and because the doctrine and the conduct to which it has given rise are fundamentally against nature, bidding men distrust their natural feelings, frustrate their natural desires and starve their natural instincts, the most drastic measures have been necessary to induce them to comply.

Of these one of the most potent has been the Church's doctrine of hell. It is fashionable to-day to whittle away the full rigours of this horrible conception, to assert that hell must be interpreted metaphorically, and that its pains and penalties are of the spirit. You yourself have bidden me privately or officially—I forget which—not to shove at open doors by attacking Christian doctrines which you do not propose to uphold and practices which you cannot hope to defend, and hell and torture, I take it, are the chief panels in the open door upon which I am not to shove.

But, though I should not for a moment dream of imputing to so civilised an opponent as yourself a willingness to take up the cudgels for the darker sides of Christianity, I cannot let these things pass merely because you hold no brief for them.

I am, you will remember, engaged in the task of explaining why I am not a Christian. One of the reasons why I am not is that I believe Christianity to have had on the whole a prejudicial effect upon human happiness. Its effects, I consider, have been in the main harmful, just as its doctrines are in the main false, and it would not be consonant with my duty to my own conviction, which includes an obligation to state it as effectively as I know how, to omit a major count in the indictment. What I want you to realise is that Christianity in some of its aspects really excites in people like me a moral repugnance. I hate cruelty and sadism, which is the spirit behind cruelty, more than anything in the world, and Christianity, with its doctrine of hell, its encouragement of asceticism, and its practice of torture, runs

like a dark thread through human history, negating kindness, killing joy, promoting pain, encouraging superstition, and at once sanctioning and confirming some of the most unlovely elements in man's nature. Hence, I cannot relieve myself of the duty of dwelling upon hell.

In view of your conception of hell as a metaphor, which is typical of the fashionable modern attitude, it seems desirable in the first place to make it plain that there is no warrant for this interpretation in Holy Writ, and that most Christians would never have countenanced it for a moment. To begin with, as you yourself have pointed out, belief in hell is authorised by Jesus Christ: "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. . . . And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."<sup>1</sup> His recorded utterances are, indeed, quite unequivocal. Unequivocal but bald! All the colour and fire come later, being imparted by the fertile imaginations of Christian ecclesiastics. To this extent my remark that hell is an invention of the priesthood must be withdrawn; it was born of the desire to do what I could by dint of a little harmless omission for the reputation and memory of one whom I both admire and revere, and I am sorry, for Christ's sake, that you won't let it pass. However, since you insist on it, Christ must have the discredit of authorising hell, and my remark is hereby qualified to apply only to the furniture, scenery and employments of the place which I am about to recount to you.

Christ's conception is clearly a physical one, implying the continuance of the physical body. As such it was interpreted throughout the Middle Ages, as witness the following quotation from St. Augustine:

"Tertullian and Chrysostom are . . . implicit on this point. . . . If, asked Jerome, the dead be not raised with flesh and bones, how can the damned after judgment gnash their teeth in hell?"

It is quite unequivocally too and in a perfectly literal sense that the doctrine is interpreted by Catholics to-day.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew xxv 41, 46.

Your recent opponent, Father Knox, made no bones about accepting a corporeal hell, and I am glad to note you found him unconvincing on the subject. Find'ng it incredible that a man of his intelligence and kindness should subscribe to such a horror, I have been looking up some Catholic literature to see if this belief is really required of him. It quite plainly is, as the following quotations from a book, *Evolution and Faith with Other Essays*, by Bishop Hedley, published in 1931 by Sheed and Ward as a representative Catholic work, show:

“1. It is an article of faith that the souls of those who die in mortal sin go down to ‘Hell’ immediately after death, and are punished with the punishments of Hell. . . .

2. It is equally of faith that there is in Hell a pain of sense (*pœna sensus*).

3. It is a certain and ‘Catholic’ truth that the ‘Fire’ of Hell is not a metaphorical fire, but true, real and material fire.

4. It is material and external, acts immediately on the persons of the lost after the consuming or ‘disrupting’ fashion of ordinary fire, and is accompanied by pain on the part of those subjected to it.”

Hell is thus a perfectly definite place where the bodies of the wicked are subjected to concrete physical torments. The whereabouts of this place is admitted by the *Catholic Encyclopædia* (1913) to be unknown:

“No cogent reason has been advanced for accepting a metaphorical interpretation in preference to the most natural meaning of the words of scripture. Hence theologians generally accept the opinion that hell is really within the earth. The Church has decided nothing on this subject; hence we may say hell is a definite place; but where it is we do not know.”

Since, however, corporeal bodies are tormented there, and since bodies occupy space, it must be somewhere in the space-time continuum. I have spoken several times of the horror of this conception. I must now, albeit reluctantly, give one or two details to justify the expression.

From the earliest times the imaginations of pious Chris-

tians have been exercised in lovingly elaborating the themes of the torments of Hell. And not only their imaginations, but their reasons! There are, indeed, few more interesting examples of the art of ratiocination than the dialectical steps by which Christian theologians have deduced as a necessary corollary from the infinite goodness of God the intensity and duration of the sufferings which He inflicts upon those whom He dislikes. The following little train of reasoning by St. Augustine is as typical as it is ingenious:

“But to say in one and the same sentence, life eternal shall be without end, punishment eternal shall have an end, were too absurd; whence, since the eternal life of saints shall be without end, punishment eternal, too, shall doubtless have no end to those whose it shall be.”

Or take this from Bishop Hedley’s book referred to above:

“The question whether there can be diminution or relaxation of the pangs of eternal damnation is one which theologians are very brief in treating. It does not seem to be of any great importance. God is just; and the just proportion of suffering may be fixed as easily by a sentence which will run for ever unchanged, as by one which will provide for mitigation after a period. . . .”

But these conclusions of reason only set new problems for imagination. Earthly torments are of finite extent; there is, it is said, a limitation to one’s ability to bear pain; a nerve gets dulled, one faints, one even dies. Again, on earth the pains of one sense inhibit or at any rate diminish those of another; one does not feel an aching corn at the moment of the impact of a cricket-ball in the stomach, or remember one’s toothache when one inadvertently touches the lighted end of a cigarette. But hell is eternal, and, since it would have been a flaw in the artistic perfection of God’s retribution to suggest that the pain might occasionally have “let up,” in however small a degree, for however short a time, the problem has been to reconcile the infinite intensity of pain both with its infinite duration and with its infinite variety, to ensure, in fact, that one should be hurt in every way at once, that no one hurt should interfere with any other,

and that this concerted symphony of pain should be played at a maximum fortissimo for ever.

It is the combination of these rather exacting requirements, the requirement of intensity, the requirement of variety, and the requirement of eternity, that the peculiar features of hell are designed to ensure, and it is only in the light of these apparently irreconcilable needs that they can be understood.

Thus the early fourteenth-century mystic, Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole near Doncaster, describes in *The Pricke of Conscience* fourteen separate, general pains suffered by the damned. I summarise his list:

1, Heat; 2, Cold; 3, Filth and Stink; 4, Hunger; 5, Thirst; 6, Darkness; 7, The Sight of Devils; 8, Vermin; 9, Beating; 10, *Gnawing of Conscience*; 11, Scalding Tears; 12, *Shame and Disgrace*; 13, Bonds of Fire; 14, *Despair*.

Christopher Love, a zealous Puritan, executed for high treason in the seventeenth century, in a series of sermons entitled *Hell's Terrors*, enumerates the torments of Hell under eight heads:

1, Variety (10,000 methods); 2, Universality (all parts afflicted); 3, Extremity ("the cholick, the gout, the strappado and the rack, the burning at the stake; these are but flea-bites to those extreme torments the body and soul must endure in hell"); 4, Continuance; 5, Society; 6, Quality (of the place); 7, Cruelty; 8, Eternity. (He adds that the wicked go on sinning in hell worse than when alive.)

But these are mere bald statements. For something more emotional we must turn to the nineteenth century. Here is the great Dr. Spurgeon telling us with infinite relish in *The Resurrection of the Dead* exactly what will happen to us, if we do not pay attention to what God, as interpreted by Dr. Spurgeon, tells us:

"When thou diest, thy *soul* will be tormented alone: that will be a hell for it; but at the day of judgment thy *body* will join thy soul, and then thou wilt have twin hells, thy soul sweating drops of blood, and thy body suffused with agony. In fire exactly like that which we have on earth, thy body will be, asbestos-like, for ever consumed, all thy veins roads

for the feet of pain to travel on, every nerve a string on which the devil shall for ever play his diabolical tune of hell's unutterable lament."

The invention of asbestos, it is clear, is a great aid to the imagination, and confers upon nineteenth-century divines a considerable advantage in device over their mediæval predecessors.

To dilate upon this appalling doctrine of hell is tempting; the subject has, indeed, a horrible fascination. The furnishing of hell has been, it is obvious, an outlet for priestly Sadism, a compensation for the privations which the vows of the priestly vocation have imposed upon the natural desires of its unfortunate followers. All around them they see human beings indulging in pleasures—bodily pleasures, fleshly pleasures—which they may not share. The thought is intolerable to them; and so they invent this horrible way of taking it out of their more fortunate brethren, by portraying for them in the vividest colours what is in store for them hereafter. It is not for nothing that fornication is one of the sins that is most frequently and horribly punished in hell, that the pains of hell are the pains of the flesh. But I am not a priest and have no call to let my imagination run away with me. I confine myself, therefore, to three points:

First, I impress upon you the appalling sum of misery for which the doctrine of hell has been responsible. The lives of millions of men and women have been darkened by its shadow; the pleasures of the young have wilted under its menace; the old have piteously clung to life for fear of meeting that with which they were threatened after death. Even little children have grown up under its shadow. The religion of my own home was of a comparatively mild variety, yet I used to lie awake night after night thinking fearfully of the prospect that awaited me, if I were so unfortunate as to offend God. Other children to my knowledge have been driven almost out of their minds by the fear of hell. And no wonder. Listen, for example, to this from *Books for Children* by Father Furniss, published in 1861:

5th dungeon: "The little child is in this red-hot oven. Hear how it screams to come out. See how it turns and twists



itself about in the fire. It beats its head against the roof of the oven. It stamps its little feet on the floor. You can see on the face of this little child what you see on the faces of all in hell—despair, desperate and horrible! . . . God was very good to this child. Very likely God saw that this child would get worse and worse and would never repent, and so it would have to be punished much more in hell. So God in His mercy called it out of the world in its early childhood.”

Christ was a gentle and compassionate man, and bade his followers love one another. He impressed upon them in particular that they should be kind to little children. Can you wonder that some of us should feel indignant that his followers should have made of his doctrine so potent an instrument of suffering and of fear? That, in particular, they should have sought so to frighten little children? That last argument of Furniss’s proving the goodness of God from the fact that he killed off the child early, thus giving it no chance to commit the sins for which he would have punished it even more horribly, is particularly choice.

Secondly, to revert to a previous argument, I find it utterly impossible to reconcile this view with the notion of a kindly God. Apart altogether from those gloomier brands of Christianity, brands which, I take it, you would not wish to defend, such as Calvinism, whose doctrine of predestination requires us to suppose that God designed the majority of human beings to everlasting torment from their very inception, so that innocent people are given no prospect but that of eternal suffering for sins which they had no choice but to commit; apart, I say, from these extreme views, there is the fact that the punishment, once pronounced, is in all the Christian doctrines with which I am acquainted irrevocable. “The damned,” says the *Catholic Encyclopædia*,<sup>1</sup> “can but hate God and work evil, whilst the just in heaven or in purgatory, being inspired solely by love of God, can but do good.”

Even the earthly code which condemns a man to a life sentence permits him to shorten it by good conduct. Is it really the case that God can be all good and yet harsher than man?

<sup>1</sup> Vol. vii, article “Hell,” by Joseph Hontheim, S.J., Professor of Dogmatic Theology at St. Ignatius’ College, Valkenburg, Holland.

## HELL AT ALL COSTS TO BE AVOIDED

Thirdly, because of the horrors of hell and the estimation in which those who believe in Christianity have rightly held them, any conduct is permissible not only to avoid them for oneself, but to avoid them for others. Human souls must at all costs be saved from hell. Now false belief is punished by hell. And so we come to the Christian concept of heresy, the view of its enormity and the consequent legitimacy of any and every method of extirpating it with the object of saving souls from hell. The subject demands a letter to itself.

Yours sincerely,  
C. E. M. JOAD.

## XVII.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
KENT.  
10th July, 1932.

DEAR JOAD,

There is one important question which you left unanswered in my last letter; please answer it. I want to know whether you accept the author of the book, from which Lecky extracted his story about Mutius, as a reliable witness to fact.

My occasional references to your own views on religion and philosophy are not an illegitimate digression, for they are designed to establish the important and relevant fact that no philosophy, yours included, is free from difficulties and apparent contradictions. You moderns always assume that you have disproved Christianity merely because you have shown that the Christian philosophy is not entirely free from difficulties. In other words, you apply to Christianity a criterion which you never dream of applying to science or to anti-Christian philosophy. You believe in evolution, for instance, a belief which most of us accept piously on authority, yet the evidence for evolution, as I have tried to show in the introduction to the new edition of my book, *The Flight from Reason*, is far weaker than the evidence for the Resurrection, and the theory of evolution is riddled with difficulties compared with which the difficulties of Christianity are trivial indeed.

The Christian accepts Christianity for a great many reasons, not least of which is the fact that all rival solutions to the great riddle are irrational. You launch, for instance, an attack on the Christian attitude to sin, and you try to create prejudice by contrasting the miserable "snivelling attitude" of the Christian, tormented by conscience, with the sane, hearty, humorous outlook of the modern, who is no longer troubled "by that formidable moral apparatus." I must reply that whereas the Christian attitude to sin is based on reason, yours is based on emotion, that you have

not begun to think out what you mean by sin, or what you mean by remorse, or what you mean by conscience, and that your reactions to these great problems are the product of your admiration for Butler and your dislike for the religious atmosphere of your youth. Very wisely you drop the subject, but let me remind you that it was you who introduced this digression, that it was you who insisted on intruding your subjective reactions to conscience into an objective discussion of the Christian attitude to sin. Clearly I had either to admit that your attitude to sin was more rational than the Christian attitude, or to expose the fundamental irrationalism of your view. No unbiased critic would describe my reply as a mere "pot-shot" or as an illegitimate digression.

I shall deal in the latter part of this book with your theory that Christianity teaches men to "distrust their natural feelings, frustrate their natural desires and starve their natural instincts," a statement which would be unjust to Puritans, and which is, of course, a complete travesty of the Catholic attitude.

My request that you should refrain from pushing at open doors was not, as you seemed to think, a cry for mercy on my behalf, but for mercy to the reader. Once I have admitted that a certain doctrine has its difficulties (a very different matter from admitting that a certain doctrine is untrue), I do not expect you to devote more space to reaffirming the existence of the difficulties in question.

And now for Hell, a subject which you discuss, as I hope to show, with unnecessary heat. I hope to satisfy you that the Roman Catholic doctrine of Hell, in so far as it has been defined, is not irrational, but I trust that my defence of the Roman Catholic view will not reawaken your suspicions of my loyalty to Anglicanism. Protestantism consists not in the affirmation of new doctrines, but in the rejection of certain Roman Catholic doctrines which the Protestant regards as unjustifiable accretions. Protestantism is, in the main, a process of subtraction. The extreme Anglo-Catholic, for instance, might be defined as a Catholic who protests against Papal infallibility, but who accepts all other Catholic doctrines; the extreme Modernist as a Protestant who rejects every Catholic doctrine excepting the doctrine of a personal

God. Now my line of defence throughout these letters has been based on the principle of *a fortiori*. If I can show that the Roman Catholic view of, say, Hell is not irrational, then *a fortiori* the milder views which are now current in Protestant communions are not irrational.

As you have admitted that the doctrine of Hell is authorised by Christ, I need not push at that particular door. I am told—I have not counted them myself—that there are at least twenty of Christ's recorded sayings which refer to Hell. It is therefore clear that the Christian cannot reject the doctrine of eternal punishment without casting doubt on all other recorded utterances of Christ. But a man who believes, as I do, that it is possible for a soul to be eternally lost, need not necessarily believe that Hell is a place where the damned are subjected to eternal torment. Even if we were to take Christ's words literally—and Christ often spoke in allegories—we should not be forced to believe in the eternal torment of the damned. The fire may well be everlasting, but Christ's words were quite consistent with annihilation by fire, or with the belief that after a period of punishment by fire the condemned soul goes on to a less uncomfortable part of Hell.

My own conscience, for instance, is not revolted by the thought that the gangsters who murdered the Lindbergh baby will perhaps be punished by a severe dose of pain, provided that the pain is not eternal, but I do not believe in the possibility that any individual, however vile, will be *eternally* tormented.

No Catholic is free to believe in the annihilation of the damned, but all Catholics are free to reject the view that the individual soul is *eternally* tormented. The damned, for all we know, may pass through the circles of Hell and eventually finish up in Limbo.

Limbo is technically part of Hell, but the punishment of Limbo is purely negative, and consists in the loss of the beatific vision. You were technically correct in stating as you did that the Church condemns the unbaptised infant to Hell, but you should have added, if you were aware of the fact, that the unbaptised infant goes to that part of Hell whose inhabitants may experience all grades of natural happiness

far exceeding in the case of the unbaptised babe the greatest happiness possible on this earth.

You may argue that it is bad luck on the unbaptised to be deprived of supernatural happiness. Yes, and it is bad luck on a dog not to be born a man, or on a cabbage not to be born a dog. But neither the cabbage nor the dog nor the man have any *right* to supernatural happiness or, indeed, any right to be born. God's justice might be questioned if you could show that he inflicted punishments capriciously, but it is not unjust to withhold an unmerited reward at his will. The human embryo originates, as you know, by the conjugation of two gametes or marrying cells. And every human being represents the odd chance in a million. Millions of gametes have remained unmated in order that two successful gametes might unite and produce my good friend C. E. M. Joad. It may well be that the supernatural life of heaven may bear to the natural life of man much the same relation as the life of man bears to that minute gamete, the cell from which the human embryo develops.

A saint in Heaven might feel much the same about his life on earth as we should feel, if we were gifted with pre-natal memory about our humble life as a gamete.

Hell is, first and foremost, the loss of supernatural happiness. The human being who goes to hell has failed to qualify for supernatural life. So much for what the Church calls the *pœna damni*, the pain of loss. Hell also involves, except for the unbaptised, the *pœna sensus* or pain of sense. We do not know what the Church means by the *pœna sensus*. It is probably something very different from physical pain as we understand that term. "It is reasonable that a soul," writes Father Knox, "which has defied the whole order of its beings and is utterly out of harmony with the environment for which it was created should be in a permanent state of dis-ease, should be, like the devils in the parable, seeking rest and finding none." That represents a severe view, but it is not heretical, though certainly "theologically rash," to hold that the soul might eventually qualify for Limbo.

The Church has never presumed to say that any particular individual, even Judas, is in Hell. It may well be, as Father Knox has suggested, that everybody receives at the moment

of death an illumination. A priest can give conditional absolution at any time within an hour of death, and it is conceivable, as Father Knox has suggested, that in the interval God speaks to the soul.

The Church teaches that only those go to Hell who *with full knowledge and consent* reject God. The punishment of Hell consists partly in the loss of supernatural happiness, partly in the pain of sense. The Church has never defined the nature of this *pœna sensus*, nor its duration.

So much for what is *de fide*. All else is pure speculation.

It is indeed remarkable that the Church should have resisted the pressure of public opinion during the ages when the more severe view of Hell was generally accepted. A Roman Catholic might well argue that the resistance of the Church to the *Zeitgeist* is an argument for its infallibility. It must have been so tempting to drive home the salutary warnings of the great Revivalists by embodying in an irreversible and infallible decree some statement as to the reality of Hell fire. And yet the Church refused to go one inch beyond the teaching of her Founder, refused either to whittle away his warning or to improve upon it.

It is important not only to listen when the Church speaks. It also is important to listen to the silences of the Church.

I quite admit that many Roman Catholic theologians have gone beyond their brief, and have represented their own personal views as an interpretation of *de fide* doctrines. Bishop Hedley, for instance, was definitely mistaken when he said that belief in a "true, real and material power" was *de fide* for Catholics. I have before me a book, *God and the Supernatural*, which consists of a series of essays by leading Roman Catholics, essays which bear the *imprimatur* of the Roman Catholic Church. "We should not under-stress," writes Father Martindale, S.J., "nor over-stress, the Biblical use of 'fire.' To start with, it is well embedded in general apocalyptic dialect, and that is largely 'pictorial.' And once, at any rate, when our Lord uses it, he couples this unquenched 'fire' with the 'undying worm'; and whether or no this image be based on the burning of dead bodies, or refuse, or of Moloch sacrifices, said by some to have taken place in the Valley of Hinnom, whence the name Gehenna, it remains that the 'worm'

## DIFFERENT VIEWS OF HELL

is plainly metaphorical, so that the 'fire' in this sentence of parallel members should be taken so too, *rather than* 'literally.' Similarly, when Genesis shows us God first moulding a clay figure, and then 'breathing-in' a soul through Himself and so making man, we should act arbitrarily in regarding the statue as 'real' when the 'breathing' is clearly metaphorical; for God does not breathe, nor is His soul breath."

I have already referred to the use of symbolism in the Bible. *Theologica symbolica non est demonstrativa* is a well-established principle amongst theologians. The milder view which regards the flames of Hell as metaphorical is not so much a concession to modern sentiments or an attempt to placate modern criticism, as a revival of a very old view. Indeed throughout the centuries there has been a steady tradition of protest against those views of Hell which I dislike as much as you do. *Nostri misericordes*, 'our party of pity,' to quote St. Augustine's kindly phrase for those who disagreed with him on this point, has never been unrepresented.

Origen (185-254) maintained that the fire of Hell is not a material fire, but self-kindled, and is, in effect, the equivalent to remorse. Origen believed in the final reconciliation between God and all sinful souls, a reconciliation which would put an end to punishment. Origen's views have not been accepted by the Roman Catholics, but none of the first four great Councils laid down doctrines concerning the eternal misery of the damned. None of these Councils alluded to or condemned the opinions of Origen and his numerous followers. It is a matter of dispute whether Origen was or was not condemned at the Fifth Council. Among the fathers and doctors of the early Church who sympathised with Origen may be mentioned Clement of Alexandria, who believed in a fire which was a spiritual fire without burning the flesh. Passages in his works are tolerant of a belief in that ultimate reconciliation which Origen had preached. The great Gregory of Nyssa held that all evil would ultimately vanish and that all punishment is educational, and remedial in its object. "His authority stood deservedly high," writes Dean Farrar in his book *Eternal Hope*, which created such a sensation, "as a great and persecuted champion of the Nicene faith, and his orthodoxy was so unimpeachable that he was one of the most



prominent figures at the Council of Constantinople." He was entrusted with the drawing up of the first draft of the Nicene Creed.

I will not bore you with a list of people who either formally adopted Origen's views, or who implied a certain sympathy with them. The greatest of these was, perhaps, St. Ambrose of Milan, who lent his support to the doctrine of universal restitution. The adoption of a more gloomy view was largely due to the influence of St. Augustine, but even at a later period, when the most terrible conceptions of hell were almost universally held, we find also widely held the doctrine of mitigation. "The punishment," says St. Thomas Aquinas, "will not be absolutely removed, but, while it lasts, pity will work by diminishing it."

Dean Farrar claims—I know not on what evidence—that Père Ravignan, the great eighteenth-century preacher, averred that doctrines similar to those of Origen were general among the Jesuits, and he adds: "Even those Roman Catholics who accept the Augustinian view of endless torment (a view first distinctly formulated in the forged and malicious Clementines) yet frankly admit that doctrine of *refrigeria* and *mitigatio* even for the damned, which is as common in the Fathers as it was universal among the Rabbis, and which no œcumenical council has condemned."

I have many Roman Catholic friends, and none of them believes in eternal and excruciating torture. This great change of attitude, which I have already described, might more fairly be described as a renaissance of a doctrine which has passed into temporary eclipse, rather than as a concession to modernism.

You attribute the invention of the horrible belief in eternal torture to "priestly sadism, a compensation for the privations which the vows of the priestly vocation have imposed upon the natural desires of its unfortunate followers." This is an excellent example of those crude simplifications, so popular among modern enemies of the Faith. I have elsewhere described as the "unification complex" the urge to reduce complicated problems to a simple formula. Darwin tried to explain all evolution by natural selection, the materialists to explain life by mechanistic monism, the modern psychologist

## THE UNIFICATION COMPLEX

to explain religion as the result of sex. But life is not simple, and will seldom admit of reduction to a single formula.

The unification complex is the result of the passion for short cuts to truth, short cuts which are popular with people who are physically or mentally fatigued. You, for instance, are puzzled to understand the motives of men who believed in eternal torments. I agree that the problem is puzzling, but I do not agree that it admits of simple solution. There are no short cuts where we are trying to synthesise different periods of time and different currents of opinion within the same period of time. And it is odd that you, who rebuke Christian dogmatism, should dogmatise so freely about motives. It is not always too easy to be sure of one's own motives, let alone the motives of one's remote ancestors. No responsible historian would attempt to pass judgment on the motives of those far-off theologians unless he had some knowledge of their works and some knowledge of the mental background of the age in which they lived. To summarise the changing views on Hell during the early centuries of the Christian era, to read St. Augustine, to discover what is *de fide* and to distinguish between the defined doctrine and pious opinion . . . well, all this takes time. And you are, as you say, a busy man. It is therefore much simpler to solve the problem by means of one general formula, more satisfying in so far as the formula selected shows up the priesthood in a bad light, and more fashionable because any explanation of religion which drags in sexual perversion is sure to go down well with the moderns. Very well then, let us damn the priests as a lot of nasty-minded Sadists and leave it at that, all the more readily because this explanation will flatter the modern, who will exclaim contentedly: "Well, I never pretended to be a saint. I'm human and all that. I have got rid of conscience, but at least I'm not a sadist. That's where all this precious harping on chastity and celibacy leads to."

Well, I too am a modern of sorts, but with the best will in the world I cannot accept your theory. Facts are stubborn things, and the facts don't support your thesis. The more severe view of Hell prevailed largely owing to the influence of St. Augustine. Now St. Augustine, before his conversion, had qualified for the approval of a modern critic by several

passionate love affairs. So he, at least, had no reason to seek compensation in mental sadism. Again, your explanation is clearly too complimentary to the mediæval priesthood. During the centuries in which the doctrine of Hell was preached with most vigour, it was only too frequent for priests to break their vows of chastity.

Dean Farrar points out that the views of St. Augustine were "far less dark, less intolerable, and less rigidly dogmatic, than those of post-Reformation theologians." Protestant theologians have been restrained by no vows of celibacy from those "fleshly pleasures" to which you refer, but few preachers have painted the horrors of hell more vividly than Jeremy Taylor and Jonathan Edwards. You favour me with extracts from the seventh-century Puritans and a particularly loathsome extract from Spurgeon, neither of which can be explained as the outcome of that sadism which you regard as a symptom of celibacy.

By the way, it may interest you to know that Father Furniss's abominable book was withdrawn from circulation, partly as the result of Protestant protests and partly in deference to equally strong protests from Roman Catholics.

But rejecting, as we must, your explanation as inconsistent with the facts, by what alternative suggestion can we explain the prevalence of the revolting belief in eternal torment in the Christian world?

In the first place we must realise the sharp contrast between the modern and the mediæval attitudes to pain. We are vastly more appalled by the thought of eternal torment than were our ancestors. You might have made out some sort of a case had you attributed the invention of these horrors to the human but regrettable desire of the early Christians to get a little of their own back on their persecutors. I am all the more surprised that you have overlooked the famous and infamous passage by Tertullian, because this passage is quoted by Lecky, your great stand-by, in a footnote. Tertullian had seen Christians burnt alive, torn with hooks and tortured on the rack, and he tells us that he looked forward with pleasure to seeing the torturers themselves "burn in a more cruel fire than they had kindled for the saints." Regrettable, but not altogether incomprehensible.

But revenge cannot have been the motive which inspired the Christians of a later age who believed in eternal torments. The clue to their attitude must be sought not in sadism, but in that attitude to sin which we have largely lost. And, if you are more anxious to understand than to travesty their attitude, you must make a heroic effort of the imagination. You must look at the world through St. Augustine's eyes, through the eyes of a man who saw the hideousness of sin, and who realised with impotent distress the difficulty of communicating his vision to others. It is amazingly difficult for you or me or the average man to bother much about sin or to believe continuously in the existence of any other world but this. And it is even more difficult for the Saint to wean men from the pomps and vanities of this world by harping merely on supernatural *rewards*. It is useless to warn the average man that he is risking the loss of supernatural happiness. You must bring home to him the peril in which he stands by threatening him not only with the negative love of God, but also with positive punishment. Must we really attribute sadism to St. Augustine to understand his over-emphasis on the horrors of Hell?

The passion for saving souls is something so remote from your experience that you cannot allow for it as a possible motive.

I do not mean to imply that the preaching of eternal flames was the result of a conscious policy, that priests who did not themselves believe in the reality of Hell fire emphasised these horrors in order to frighten people into virtue. Many, perhaps the majority, of Roman priests still accept this view of Hell. And even those who take a milder view would consider it wrong to preach a milder view. It is safer to take too severe rather than too lax a view of Hell. We know nothing for certain excepting the intensely serious attitude of our Lord. We have his repeated warnings before us, and it is better to run the risk of frightening people unnecessarily rather than to lull them into false security with fatal results. I regard Hell as an integral part of the Christian scheme. To win through to supernatural life man needs the inspiration of a reward and the fear of punishment. If it was supremely worth while for a gamete to win through by great pain and effort, and, helped by grace, to become a Joad, it is no less important for a Joad,

helped by Lunn, to win through to the super-Joadian state. The lazy soul may say that he does not want the supernatural life because he cannot picture it, and the vivid imagery of Hell fire may provide the soul in question with the stimulus that it needs. The gamete, too, might be content to perish from ignorance or inertia, but for the inducement which nature holds out to the gamete to move up higher. Man requires not only a carrot but a spur—the carrot of reward, the spur of fear.

You claim Christ as a compassionate and sympathetic character, a claim I do not, of course, dispute. But it seems a little rough to brand by implication St. Augustine as a sadist, for the worst that can be said of him is that he took Christ's words, which were perhaps intended symbolically, in their literal sense.

The mediæval tympanum had two sides, and it is in part to the dramatic love of oleographically vivid contrasts that we owe not only the golden paved Heaven but the red-hot Hell.

I do not agree with you that belief in Hell has been responsible for "an appalling sum of misery." No Catholic believes he is going to Hell, for every Catholic knows that he can escape Hell by a death-bed confession and absolution, or in the absence of a priest by an act of contrition. The doctrine of Hell has had a more depressing effect on Protestants, because the Protestants dropped Purgatory. A Catholic sinner could argue: "Of course I shall have a bad time in Purgatory, but I shall get to Heaven ultimately"; whereas a Protestant sinner, who believes that his destination, Heaven or Hell, is decided at the moment of death, might reasonably feel that he is certainly not qualified for Heaven, and that consequently Hell was the only possible alternative. Even so, as all great revivalists have found, it is extremely difficult to make men imaginatively realise the possibility of eternal punishment. Mr. Coulton refers to "the strong undercurrent of resentment against the doctrine of Hell that persisted throughout the Middle Ages," and he adds: "The crescendo of pious exaggeration shows that Hell terrors had a tendency to wear dull among the multitude . . . We can see that the general mind tended to grow callous from excessive friction upon that one spot. In the middle of the fourteenth century Meffret tells us

#### A CONSOLING NOTE

how the laity of his time fear not hell, nor care for it; 'unless the priests talked about hell, they would starve.' For the majority of lay-folk, heaven and hell never became insistent and effectual realities until their death-bed."

One word more in conclusion. False belief is not, as you suggest, invariably punished by Hell, provided that the heretic is in good faith. The doctrine of invincible ignorance was promulgated to provide particularly for people, like yourself, who have taken a First in Greats.

And on this consoling note I will end.

Yours ever,  
ARNOLD LUNN.

## XVIII.

DEAR LUNN,

The answer to the question "Is Cassian's *De Cœnobi-  
orium Institutis* a reliable authority?" is that I haven't the slightest idea. I am not an historian; I have no access to the original authorities which Lecky consulted, and I am no more in a position than yourself to determine their reliability. I do not, however, feel the qualms about the reliability or otherwise of Cassian which your repeated question seems designed to have provoked:

(a) Because Lecky's reputation is not only that of a first-class scholar, but of a scrupulously careful historian who devoted years of preparation to the compilation of his great work. I have a good mind, therefore, to say that what is good enough for Lecky is good enough for me, and to leave it at that.

(b) Because in the light of the beliefs and practices I described to you in my fourteenth letter, the story seems eminently credible; its atmosphere has the authentic Christian flavour. For is there not a better authority even than Cassian or Lecky for just this sort of thing? Cast your mind back to that little affair in Moriah in which Abraham, Isaac, and God were the chief actors. God wanted to be sure that Abraham loved Him more than he loved his son Isaac, and he accordingly ordered Abraham to kill Isaac. And Abraham was just about to do it too, when God stopped him in the nick of time. This gratuitous playing with the feelings of fathers for their children—I say nothing of the unpleasantness of the whole thing from Isaac's point of view—is thoroughly characteristic of the Christian Gods. All the Christian Gods are apt to be suspicious of family affection. They don't like infringements of what they consider to be their monopoly; it is one of the many aspects of their

## CONFLICT OF CHRISTIAN AUTHORITIES

embracing jealousy. Even Christ, the best of them, fluttered the dovescotes by bidding his disciples abandon their nearest kin, parents their children, children their parents, husbands their wives to follow him, and promising them great rewards if they did so, an injunction so entirely in the vein of the monks' command to Mutius, that really I am unable to find any good ground for uneasiness as to the credibility of this otherwise astonishing story.

Since you have started the practice of pressing questions on points of detail, let me follow with one or two of my own. Do you, or do you not, accept the quotation about Hell from Bishop Hedley purporting to show that its fire is *not* metaphorical and asserting as "a certain and '*Catholic*' " (my italics) "truth" that, in fact, it is not, as an authoritative statement of Catholic doctrine? Bishop Hedley includes this doctrine among those that are "of faith," which is, presumably, the significance of the word "*Catholic*."

Do you, or do you not, accept the quotation from the *Catholic Encyclopædia*, "No cogent reason has been advanced for accepting a metaphorical interpretation in preference to the most natural meaning of the words of Scripture"? If you do accept the statements contained in these quotations, a good deal of your letter seems to me to be beside the point. If you do not, what becomes of the argument upon which you have laid great stress, that, when your independent reason has convinced you that the Church is the vehicle of revealed truth, it is then reasonable to accept what it says on faith? For example, "Having travelled thus far by reason unaided by authority, it is not irrational to trust the authority whose credentials have been approved by reason." (Quotation from your third letter, see p. 34.)

The *Catholic Encyclopædia* is, I gather, an official production, and Bishop Hedley a Bishop of the Catholic Church. Ought you not, then, to accept them as authoritative, and, if you do not, what grounds can you give me for accepting your account of the matter rather than theirs?

As to the eternity of punishment in Hell, allow me one more quotation from Bishop Hedley: "The dogma of the Eternity of Punishment cannot, it is admitted, be proved from reason alone. It is God's revelation which makes us



certain of it. Yet reason does not contradict it; nay, as we see reason expects and anticipates it" (*Evolution and Faith with Other Essays*, by Bishop Hedley, pp. 156-157).

You say that the "Church teaches that only those go to Hell who *with full knowledge and consent* reject God." Will you please tell me how anyone in their senses could knowingly reject God, if he also knew that he was to be burnt more or less eternally (I insert the "more or less" as a concession to "Limbo") for doing it. If he didn't know this, his rejection could not be said to be with full knowledge and consent. Lastly, why, if God grants and "withholds supernatural rewards at his will," am I prevented from holding that he acts capriciously?

I come now to the Christian contribution to human pain. I do not wish to harry the feelings of our readers or to sully the pages of this book with even a hint of the things that Christians have done to each other with the object of establishing their claim to be the true interpreters of the gospel of love; but there are certain things which must be said, even if the door is, so far as you are concerned, an open one.

Let us first consider in their most creditable aspect the surprising performances of those who were commanded to love one another; let us take the torturing of Christians by Christians at its terrible best. I have already pointed out that the fertility of Christian imaginations had made hell so horrible that anything was worth enduring in order to avoid it. Very well, then, it was only in their own interests that those in danger of hell should be made to endure anything. As one's best chance of avoiding hell was to embrace the true faith, Catholic or Protestant, as the case might be, Catholics were justified in torturing Protestants, Protestants Catholics, until they had succeeded in hurting them so much that they recanted their "errors"—Catholic or Protestant, as the case might be—and agreed to take the same view of the supernatural government of the universe as their torturers. You say that a passion for saving souls is so remote from my experience that I do not allow for it as even a possible motive. I am always glad to meet your views to the best of my ability, and I propose, therefore, here and now to give the fullest possible weight to this motive.

I do not propose to deny, then, that there may have been an element of sheer altruism, the desire to save their fellow beings from eternal torture in the future, in the complex motives of those who tortured with such a will in the present. But from the first this altruism at the expense of others was prepared, to put it mildly, to take very considerable liberties with the persons of those whom for their own good it insisted upon saving.

Consider, for instance, the famous witch persecutions. The most outstanding feature of the Christian persecution of witches was the sheer quantity of brute human suffering that it involved. I recently read an account of the matter by an author who had confined his researches to the recorded occurrences in one small province in the middle of Germany. In this province, during a period of about seventy-five years ending early in the sixteenth century, he estimates that over a quarter of a million women were burnt as witches. In many villages it was impossible to find a single woman alive of over forty years of age. The expenditure on the necessary pitch and faggots proved after a time so burdensome a tax on the village exchequers, that in some cases burning at the stake had to be abandoned and roasting in an oven was substituted. Ovens, you see, were more economical, since one oven would do for any number of witches.

One naturally wonders on what grounds these women came to be accused and condemned. Nobody, presumably, had seen them passing through keyholes, riding on broomsticks, or having intercourse with the devil. They were, it appears, in every case condemned on their own confession. They said that they had done these things, and they said that they had done them because they were tortured and re-tortured until they preferred being roasted to death in an oven to being tortured any more. One woman, I read, was tortured and re-tortured in this way on fifty-six separate occasions. During torture each woman was pressed to name her accomplice, which in the hope of obtaining some alleviation of her agony she invariably did. Thus each accused became a little centre of infection from which fresh accusations, tortures, and confessions spread out in every direction. I should, perhaps, add that the witch persecutions were the work of the Catholic Church.

Now the pious ecclesiastics who accused and tortured and condemned these poor creatures may, I am prepared to believe, have acted from creditable motives, even from kindness of heart. They resolved to hurt the women on earth, in the hope of preventing them from being hurt hereafter by God. An earthly fire was, no doubt, pretty bad, especially if slow, but it was nothing to an infernal one, and even the slowest oven that ever roasted polished one off after a few hours, whereas in hell one burnt for ever. God, as became His omnipotence, was obviously more efficient at the job of hurting than man; hence, if man could deprive God of raw material for torment, by causing witches to repent and heretics to recant, so much the better for them.

On this attempt of mine, rather unconvincing I admit, to interpret Christian torturing in the most charitable light three comments may be made in passing. First, notice the implied conception of God as an arch-sadist making the most elaborate provision for human suffering which the whole attitude of mind implies. Secondly, the fact that the tortures inflicted on the witch and the heretic may have proceeded from human error and not from human cruelty, did not make them any easier to bear. Those who commanded the torture, those, even, who inflicted it, may, it is conceivable, have loathed the task which they believed to be their duty; but this attitude of mind on the part of the torturer did not help the tortured. Much human suffering has been inflicted from the best possible motives. Thirdly, it was Christianity that was responsible for the set of beliefs upon which the torturers acted and for the human agony which their application involved.

It is, however, only rarely that it seems possible to adopt this comparatively charitable interpretation of the motives of Christian torturers. Not the least horrible thing about the appetite for cruelty is that it grows with what it feeds on, and it is hard to resist the conclusion that the official theory that one was saving the souls of heretics was only too often a cloak for less creditable motives. What, for example, do you make of cases such as the following, which I quote from Arturo Graf's *The Story of the Devil*, published this year and translated from the Italian by E. N. Stone?

"In Lindheim, a village of Hesse, four or five women were accused of having dug up the body of an infant and having employed it in the concoction of the usual witches' brew. Being tortured in the prescribed manner, they confessed the crime. Then the husband of one of them succeeded in having the graveyard visited, the better to arrive at the facts of the case. When the grave was opened the little body was seen intact, lying in the coffin; but the inquisitor, not in the least disconcerted, declared that this must be an illusion of the accursed Devil; and since he already had the confessions of the guilty women, no further investigation should be made, but justice should be allowed to take its course to the honour and glory of the Most Holy Trinity; and so the women were burned alive."

Now when all allowance is made for the power of superstition, I find it extraordinarily difficult to believe that the inquisitor really held that the corpse in the coffin was not a corpse at all, but an illusion sent by the devil. He may have done so, of course; there is no knowing to what lengths of folly and cruelty human beings will not go when they are convinced that they are the interpreters of God's will, and wish to persuade others to share their conviction. But let us suppose that the reason alleged for allowing "justice to take its course" was in fact the correct one, that the inquisitor really believed what he said. What follows? First, that under the influence of ecclesiastical dogmas an official representing an immensely powerful organisation makes gross and elementary mistakes on points of fact—viz., (a) he believes that witches exist, (b) that they are creatures of the devil, (c) that four of them have performed an action which they did not perform, (d) that burning their bodies will regenerate their souls (or possibly other people's souls, assuming that the real object of the burning was *encourager les autres*), (e) that a corpse is not a corpse, but an illusion.

Secondly, that under the influence of these mistakes he inflicts the most appalling physical agony on five human beings. Thirdly, that when concrete evidence is produced to show that he was in fact mistaken, he denies it, and in spite of the plain evidence of his senses, gratuitously

fabricates a patent falsehood in order to justify his initial error.

Now this gratuitous piling of a Pelion of self-deception upon an Ossa of error clearly springs from the initial dogmas with which the inquisitor starts. It was because he believed that he knew the nature of God's wishes in regard to witches, because he considered it his duty to implement them, and because he was imbued with a consequential zeal for the extirpation of witches that he behaved as he did. If Christianity had not been believed in, the error would not have been made, the cruelty would not have occurred. This, mark you, is on the assumption that the inquisitor was the simple dupe of his own dogmas. Personally I am inclined to think him rogue rather than fool, and to believe that he was using Christian dogmas as a pretext for the indulgence of his own sadistic impulses. I gather from your last letter that this is not a suggestion which you are likely readily to countenance. When I hinted that some of the gorier details of hell were probably the offspring of sadistic priestly imaginations, you threatened me with a "unification complex," which appears to be a grand way of saying that I am assigning an over-simple explanation to a complex and various set of occurrences. I cannot help thinking that the "unification complex" is a very large sledge-hammer to crush a very small pea. I hinted at sadism, (a) Because when one comes across a persistent dwelling upon the details of physical torture—and I really must insist that hell has been commonly regarded as a place of *physical* pain—one infers an interest in pain which may be, and only too often is, a sublimated version of the desire to inflict it. (b) Because the ghoulish gusto with which the writers about hell "lay-on" its tortures, suggests a real pleasure in the job. (c) Because it is notorious that starved sexual instincts have a habit of expressing themselves in just this way.

But I never suggested that the *whole* conception of hell was the expression of sadism or that *all* the apparatus of the place described by Christian theologians was susceptible of this explanation.

I come back to sadism now because on no other hypothesis does it seem to me to be possible adequately to explain the truly prodigious scale upon which torture was for hundreds

of years practised by Christian authorities in the professed endeavour to make other people share their own views of the nature and intentions of God and the doctrines of Christ, or to account for the sheer brute quantity of suffering that the Inquisition caused. To adapt a recent remark of your own on monasticism, "Surely it is irrational to suppose that" torture "would have survived for all these centuries, unless it had satisfied some deep-seated human need."<sup>1</sup> And can these apparently intelligent ecclesiastics have been so besotted as to suppose that one really endears one's opinions to people by torturing them?

For consider the facts. I will take one area, the Netherlands, a typical one, in which the operations of the religion of love can be seen in full blast. During the years of Torquemada's administration of the Spanish Inquisition in the Netherlands, "ten thousand and two hundred and twenty individuals were burned alive, and ninety-seven thousand three hundred and twenty-one punished with infamy, confiscation of property, or perpetual imprisonment, so that the total number of families destroyed by this one friar alone amounted to one hundred and fourteen thousand four hundred and one."<sup>2</sup> I quote from Motley's *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* to give you an idea of the sort of thing to which these bald figures bear witness.

The Inquisition "was a court owning allegiance to no temporal authority, superior to all other tribunals. It was a bench of monks without appeal, having its familiars in every house, diving into the secrets of every fireside, judging and executing its horrible decrees without responsibility. It condemned not deeds, but thoughts. It affected to descend into individual consciences, and to punish the crimes which it pretended to discover. Its process was reduced to a horrible simplicity. It arrested on suspicion, tortured till confession, and then punished by fire. Two witnesses, and those to separate facts, were sufficient to consign the victim to a loathsome dungeon. Here he was sparingly supplied with food, forbidden to speak, or even to sing—to which pastime it could hardly be thought he would feel much inclination—and then left to himself till famine and misery should break

<sup>1</sup> P. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Motley, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic*, p. 165.

his spirit. When that time was supposed to have arrived, he was examined. Did he confess, and forswear his heresy, whether actually innocent or not, he might then assume the sacred shirt, and escape with confiscation of all his property. Did he persist in the avowal of his innocence, two witnesses sent him to the stake, one witness to the rack. He was informed of the testimony against him, but never confronted with the witness. That accuser might be his son, father, or the wife of his bosom, for all were enjoined, under the death-penalty, to inform the inquisitors of every suspicious word which might fall from their nearest relatives. The indictment being thus supported, the prisoner was tried by torture. The rack was the court of justice; the criminal's only advocate was his fortitude—for the nominal counsellor, who was permitted no communication with the prisoner, and was furnished neither with documents nor with power to procure evidence, was a puppet, aggravating the lawlessness of the proceedings by the mockery of legal forms. The torture took place at midnight, in a gloomy dungeon, dimly lighted by torches. The victim—whether man, matron, or tender virgin—was stripped naked and stretched upon the wooden bench. Water, weights, fires, pulleys, screws—all the apparatus by which the sinews could be strained without cracking, the bones bruised without breaking, and the body racked exquisitely without giving up its ghost—were now put into operation. The executioner, enveloped in a black robe from head to foot, with his eyes glaring at his victim through the holes cut in the hood which muffled his face, practised successively all the forms of torture which the devilish ingenuity of the monks had invented. The imagination sickens when striving to keep pace with these dreadful realities. Those who wish to indulge their curiosity concerning the details of the system may easily satisfy themselves at the present day. The flood of light which has been poured upon the subject more than justifies the horror and the rebellion of the Netherlanders.

The period during which torture might be inflicted from day to day was unlimited in duration. It could only be terminated by confession; so that the scaffold was the sole refuge from the rack. Individuals have borne the torture and

the dungeon fifteen years, and have been burned at the stake at last."<sup>1</sup>

Such, briefly, was the Spanish Inquisition as it was experienced by the people of the Netherlands, and described by the biographer of Philip II of Spain as a "heavenly remedy, a guardian angel of Paradise, a lion's den, in which Daniel and other just men could sustain no injury, but in which perverse sinners were torn to pieces."

I ask you especially to note this description. There was, you see, no doubt in the minds of those responsible for it—at least no doubt was professed—that the Inquisition was doing God's work. It was veritably an instrument of Christian grace.

One further point and I have done with the Netherlands. These appalling cruelties were not inflicted by Christians upon non-Christian unbelievers, but by Christians upon Christians.

The victims believed that there was a God, that He created the world, and that He was good; they believed also that Christ was the Son of God and that His teaching revealed divine truth. But they differed slightly from their persecutors in their interpretation of doubtful points in that teaching; they differed in refusing to take its self-appointed official expositors at their own valuation; they even dared to claim the right of interpreting the teaching for themselves. In other words, they read the Bible or sang hymns. Occupations innocent enough, one would have thought, and yet—I am quoting again from Motley:

"Hearing once that a certain schoolmaster named Geleyn de Muler, of Audenarde, '*was addicted to reading the Bible,*'" Titelmann "summoned the culprit before him and accused him of heresy. The schoolmaster claimed, if he were guilty of any crime, to be tried before the judges of his town. 'You are my prisoner,' said Titelmann, 'and are to answer me and none other.' The inquisitor proceeded accordingly to catechise him, and soon satisfied himself of the schoolmaster's heresy. He commanded him to make immediate recantation. The schoolmaster refused. 'Do you not love your wife and children?' asked the demoniac Titelmann. 'God knows,' answered the heretic, 'that if the whole world were of gold,

<sup>1</sup> Motley, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic*, p. 165.



and my own, I would give it all only to have them with me, even had I to live on bread and water, and in bondage.' 'You have, then,' answered the inquisitor, 'only to renounce the error of your opinions.' 'Neither for wife, children, nor all the world, can I renounce my God and religious truth,' answered the prisoner. Thereupon Titelmann sentenced him to the stake. . . ."

"In the next year Titelmann caused one Robert Ogier, of Ryssel, in Flanders, to be arrested, together with his wife and two sons. Their crime consisted in not going to mass, and in practising private worship at home. They confessed the offence, for they protested that they could not endure to see the profanation of their Saviour's name in the idolatrous sacraments. They were asked what rites they practised in their own home. One of the sons, a mere boy, answered, 'We fall on our knees, and pray to God that He may enlighten our hearts and forgive our sins. We pray for our sovereign, that his reign may be prosperous and his life peaceful. We also pray for the magistrates and others in authority, that God may protect and preserve them all.' The boy's simple eloquence drew tears even from the eyes of some of his judges; for the inquisitor had placed the case before the civil tribunal. The father and eldest son were, however, condemned to the flames. 'O God!' prayed the youth at the stake, 'Eternal Father, accept the sacrifice of our lives, in the name of Thy beloved Son.' 'Thou liest, scoundrell!' fiercely interrupted a monk who was lighting the fire; 'God is not your father; ye are the devil's children.' As the flames rose about them, the boy cried out once more, 'Look, my father, all heaven is opening, and I see ten hundred thousand angels rejoicing over us. Let us be glad, for we are dying for the truth.' 'Thou liest! thou liest!' again screamed the monk; 'all hell is opening, and you see ten thousand devils thrusting you into eternal fire.' Eight days afterwards, the wife of Ogier and his other son were burned; so that there was an end of that family."

"Thomas Calberg, tapestry-weaver, of Tournay, within the jurisdiction of the same inquisitor, was convicted of having copied some hymns from a book printed in Geneva. He was burned alive. Another man, whose name has perished, was

hacked to death with seven blows of a rusty sword, in presence of his wife, who was so horror-stricken that she died on the spot before her husband. His crime, to be sure, was Anabaptism, the most deadly offence in the calendar.”<sup>1</sup>

And these things were done in the name of Him who commanded his followers to love one another. From first to last during the Emperor Charles V's reign, between 50,000 and 100,000 people suffered death for their religious opinions in the Netherlands. So much for the Netherlands!

For the rest I must content myself with bare figures that you may know that the sort of thing I have been describing was no isolated instance of persecution, but reasonably typical of Christian treatment of fellow-Christians during the centuries concerned.

*France.*—In 1393 Borel of Grenoble brought 150 persons to the stake in one day. Between 1308 and 1328 Gui, the Inquisitor of Toulouse, put to death 638 heretics in that town alone. At Rheims in 1239, 183 Manicheans were burnt before seventeen bishops and 10,000 people.

*Spain.*—In twenty-seven months, 1482-4, 2,000 persons were burnt in Seville alone, while in the same city 17,000 persons were taught the elements of Christianity by suffering punishments which ranged from torture to fines, confiscations, imprisonments, deportations, dismissals from employment, and that comparatively benevolent penalty called civil death. As to quality—but I really cannot soil the pages of these letters with even a bare mention of the things the Holy Inquisition did to people, in the endeavour to make them share its views about the details of Christian theology.

And so on and so on. Similar figures could be given for Italy, Bohemia and Germany proper.

In addition to the cruelty I am also impressed by the bigotry of these persecuting priests. If these horrors (and, if you question the word “horrors,” I shall have no alternative but to harden my heart and outrage our readers' squeamishness with precise details of a few Inquisition tortures)<sup>2</sup> had been directed to any good end, to the diminution of crime,

<sup>1</sup> Motley, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic*, pp. 170, 171.

<sup>2</sup> See for further information Swayne's book *The Pleasures of the Torture Chamber*.

the promotion of kindliness, the encouragement of tolerance, the spread of knowledge, the raising of the level of civility and manners, although no ends could have justified such means, such outrages would, at least, have been comprehensible. In fact, this fury of cruelty was exerted on behalf of objects of negligible importance, to produce effects of more than doubtful value. When it might have used its power to promote public good, even perhaps to have enforced the practice of some small part of the precepts of Christ, the Inquisition led men to suppose that the only crimes demanding punishment were doubt as to the accuracy of the Church's knowledge, and failure to attend it on the Sabbath. It stimulated morbid sensitiveness to the minutiae of doctrinal differences, until a dispute over the interpretation of a passage or the precise location of a chasuble was capable of convulsing Europe from end to end. Oh, these priests!

Now, with all possible deference to your dissertation on "the unification complex," I still suggest to you that the most plausible interpretation of this horrible chapter in the history of Christianity is simple sadism. The Inquisitors really liked torturing people. Torturing also gratified their sense of power, pacified the resentment of those whose pride caused them to regard disagreement on a point of doctrine as a personal affront, and compensated them for their starved sexual desires. In Christianity they found at once a sanction and an outlet for their cruelty; a sanction, because the Christian God is Himself angry and cruel as evidenced by His invention of Hell (since you *will* have me attribute Hell to God) to perpetuate for ever the atrocities which man can only manage for a limited period; an outlet, because any torment could be represented as justifiable in order to save human beings from the consequences of His anger.

All through the history of Christianity Christians have used God's cruelty as an excuse for their own. This cruelty is less to-day only because the power of Christianity is less. If the Church had the power, I do not doubt but that it would treat me as it treated heretics in the Netherlands some five hundred years ago. The old intolerance, the old dogmatic assurance, the old claim to be the repository of absolute truth, and the

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self-imposed duty of making things uncomfortable for those who question the claim, still persist. Reading the *Catholic Encyclopædia*, I find persecution still defended as a religious duty. I find Father Giraud in his article on "Toleration" still informing me that the Church of Rome alone possesses the truth (I suppose he has not heard of that little *faux pas* over Galileo), and therefore has a right to be intolerant. In fact, you yourself have, if I remember, threatened me with Judgment Day wrath, unless I have the good sense to agree with you.

All the way down the ages this sadistic Christian insistence on sin and punishment and suffering runs like a dark thread through the tangled skein of human history. Suffering is good, because it chastises man's presumptuous spirit. Solicitous for our welfare, God accordingly provides us with generous doses of it, and, since these are sent as a discipline for the good of our souls, it is wrong to try and avoid them.

Combined with that other Christian view that the flesh is wicked and ought to be mortified, this attitude to suffering has been and still is responsible for a great mass of avoidable human pain. Take, for example, the case of those who suffer from incurable diseases. I have before me as I write the literature of a society, the Euthanasia Society, which aims at so altering the law that a doctor may, with proper safeguards, be authorised to put to death sick persons who (*a*) are incurable, (*b*) in great pain, and (*c*) ask him to do so. The law, as it stands at present, precludes a doctor from doing anything of the kind. Let us see what this prohibition involves in practice by taking a concrete case. A man, let us say (I make the case hypothetical to save your feelings, but I actually know of such a person), is suffering from cancer of the larynx. No operation is possible and his eventual end is certain. It is also certain to be painful, the only doubt being whether the cancer will strangle him by making it impossible to breathe, or starve him by making it impossible to eat. Before him there stretch months of agony terminating in a hideous race between slow strangulation and slow starvation. Those who care for him must watch him slowly die without being able to alleviate his pain. The common-sense method of dealing with such a case would be

for a specialist to sign an affidavit saying that the disease is incurable, for the patient to sign an affidavit saying that he desires to be painlessly destroyed, and for a doctor to be then empowered to take the necessary steps to give effect to his wish. If you cannot see that this mode of treatment is better, more rational, more humane, more civilised than the present practice of letting the man die in agony because nobody is entitled to shorten his sufferings, I have nothing to say to you. I shall assume, however, that you can, and do see this, and that you are, therefore, immediately prompted to ask: "Why does the law not permit such action to be taken?" The answer is simple: "Because of the opposition of the Church." In its efforts to get the law amended the Euthanasia Society meets with the continual opposition of Christian clergymen, not of all clergymen, but of most. While doctors are in the main favourable, recognising that it is the province of their art to help those to die whom they cannot help to live, parsons as usual oppose.

Their stated objections may be summarised as follows: First, God alone confers life, therefore it is for God alone to decree its end. Painlessly to destroy an incurable patient would be for men to usurp God's function. Secondly, artificially to end a patient's life is to assist him to avoid a divinely appointed discipline of trial and suffering. For God wills this suffering; moreover, He wills it with a purpose; so much so, that I have actually seen the suggestion made that the more suffering God inflicts now—*i.e.*, before death—the more will He be inclined to mercy and forgiveness on the Day of Judgment, which means, in plain terms, the less suffering will He be likely to inflict after death. The use of anæsthetics, especially for women in childbirth, was opposed by parsons in the nineteenth century on the same grounds.

As regards the first objection, it seems sufficient to point out that clergymen object neither to war (war, of course, meaning war in a righteous cause; but then, when is it not?) nor to capital punishment. But it is to the second that I would chiefly draw your attention; for this is simply a modern version of the argument of those who defended themselves for burning witches and heretics in the present on the

## BELIEF IN GOD'S CRUELTY

ground that they were endeavouring to save them from burning by God hereafter. Hence, the relevance to these letters on hell and torture of the contemporary objection to easy death.

In concluding, therefore, I ask you to notice three points. First, note again the belief in God's cruelty. God, it seems, is always wanting to hurt somebody. If He hurts them less here, He will hurt them more hereafter; if more here, possibly less hereafter. What a character for a benevolent God! Secondly, and as a consequence, it is on the whole desirable in cases of doubt that people should be hurt more here. God is angry with sinners and wishes to inflict pain on them; but the ferocity of His anger may be mitigated if they are made to suffer now. Hence the Inquisition, hence the burning of heretics and witches, hence, too, the objection to anæsthetics and to easy death. Man, in fact, will be well advised to do a little hurting on his own in order to relieve God of the necessity. Thirdly, this attitude, with all that it implies of human pain and suffering, has persisted right down the ages and expresses itself as surely in the objection to easy death and birth control (reserved for a later letter) today, as it expressed itself in the objection to anæsthetics yesterday, and in burnings and torturings the day before yesterday. And if, in the light of this brief record, you propose to tell me that these Christian doctrines and the practices they have sanctioned have not contributed to the increase of human suffering and the diminution of human happiness, I shall not believe you, and I hope that nobody else will believe you either.

Yours ever,  
CYRIL JOAD.

## XIX.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
KENT.  
17th July, 1932.

DEAR JOAD,

My reason for asking you whether you accepted Cassian's book as a reliable authority will be apparent at a later stage of this discussion. In the case of the Gospels, as in the case of *De Cœnobiorum Institutis*, you will doubtless hold yourself free to accept as historical any statement which suits your brief and to reject as mythical any statement which supports the supernatural. These records of the desert monks teem with miracles which you reject, and on your theory only become historical when they provide you with ammunition against Christianity. I shall remind you of your remark that "Christian gods are apt to be suspicious of family affection," if you attack the Catholic refusal to sanction divorce.

I do not accept Bishop Hedley or the *Catholic Encyclopædia* as infallible exponents of Roman Catholic doctrine for reasons which you will find on pp. 36, 37. You will remember that Roman Catholics must accept a doctrine defined as infallible by General Councils or by the Pope, but are perfectly free to question, and in fact do question, the views of individual theologians, such as Bishop Hedley, or of the contributors to the *Catholic Encyclopædia*. Even the Pope, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, can err in his pronouncements as a private doctor, and in fact some such Papal errors are admitted. Why should a Roman Catholic believe Bishop Hedley when he says that the fire of hell is real, and not believe Father Martindale, who is quite as competent a theologian, when he suggests that the fire of hell may be metaphorical?

"Church History," as Dom Cuthbert Butler remarks, "is largely made up of the differences and quarrels of good men." If the *pœna sensus* means, which it doesn't, anything

## WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

remotely resembling the pain of being burnt alive, I agree with you that no sinner would reject God with "full knowledge and consent." From which it follows either that Hell is "a place of Eternal torment eternally untenanted," a remark attributed to Cardinal Manning, or, as I believe, Hell is the place inhabited by those who have failed to qualify for eternal life. I have already dealt with the question as to whether God is capricious. "Capricious" is defined by the *Oxford Dictionary* as "guided by a whim." If God does not possess freewill he is not God in any intelligible sense of the term. If he does, he is not necessarily "guided by a whim" because he decides that a cabbage cannot, and a man can qualify for supernatural happiness.

So much for your questions on points of detail.

And now for the Inquisition.

It is time to define what we mean by Christianity. Christianity is not the same as Christendom, nor can we equate Christianity with the actions of Christians. Christianity is the revelation of God through his son Christ. It is a light which lighteth the darkness, the darkness of human passions, cruelty, greed, selfishness and vice. Sometimes the light gains and the area of darkness ebbs back; sometimes the darkness gains. There is no warrant in the gospel for any belief in the inevitable triumph of Christianity. We leave to the moderns that belief in inevitable progress, for which there is no scrap of evidence, theological or scientific. "Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" All we know is that the Church will survive to the end, but whether the Church at the second coming will be the Church triumphant or a Church which has returned to the catacombs we cannot tell.

Every age and every individual is free to accept or to reject Christ. Nor need this surprise us. God, had He chosen, might have made his revelation so crystal clear that it would be as difficult for men to disbelieve in Christianity as to disbelieve in their own existence; Christ, instead of living for thirty years, might have lived for three thousand years; miracles might be as plentiful and as well attested as the existence of blackberries. But God has not chosen to work like that. The truths of divine science, as we may call



theology, are, like the truths of natural science, the reward of hard work and research. The proofs of Christianity are strong enough to convince any man who approaches the subject with a genuinely open mind, but they are not completely coercive. Conviction is the reward of that form of research which we call prayer. Those who are depressed with the difficulty of converting the world to Christianity should console themselves with the recollection that his Galilean contemporaries did not find it easy to recognise Christ for what he was during those few years when his gracious presence moved among men.

Christianity is a light which lighteth the world; it is a light, but not a floodlight. It illumines, but it does not dispel the darkness of human error and human sin.

My first point, then, is that fallen man is by nature cruel. If one reads the records of the past, one begins to wonder whether sadism was an exotic, rather than a commonplace vice. When you tell me that the Church has "availed itself of torture on a hitherto undreamt-of scale," you are allowing your creditable hatred of cruelty to warp your historical judgment. This correspondence must not degenerate into a discussion of comparative atrocities, so I will content myself with remarking that we must look to the East for the development of torture as a fine art. Lea, who is no friend to the Inquisition, asserts that the Inquisition merely adopted the normal methods of torture current at the time, which were far less cruel than many tortures employed by Nero or by secular princes for their own amusement.

There is also, as I think you will admit, a moral difference between applying torture reluctantly for a good end, or an end that is believed to be good, and applying it purely for the fun of the thing. We should all, in certain cases, agree to torture. If your child had been captured by gangsters who were sending you one of its fingers every day in the hope of extracting a ransom which you could not possibly collect, and if you managed to get hold of one of the gangsters in question and could extract from him the whereabouts of his colleagues by applying red-hot coals to his feet, you would, I hope, not shrink from using torture.

And now for religious persecution. It is important to

realise that religious persecution is only one species of the genus persecution. Ever since the world began, the majority has persecuted the minority on those points which the majority feel strongly. There is, indeed, no reason for the mystical belief in the necessity for tolerating free speech, since there is no more reason why we should tolerate free speech than free action. A speech which incites to action punishable by law should be punished no less than the action itself. And, as a matter of fact, we should all persecute, if we had the power, the advocates of doctrines which we regarded as pernicious. The Victorian Liberal was only tolerant in so far as he was agnostic. He was prepared to tolerate varieties of religious opinion, because he felt instinctively that differences of opinion about religion did not matter, but he would not have tolerated free speech in Hyde Park had the speaker advocated the seduction of young girls or the beauties of unnatural vice. You yourself feel strongly on the subject of torture, and if there was the least danger of torture being revived in defence of religious truth or in defence of the State in time of war, you would, if you were in a position so to do, persecute with full vigour the advocates of such abominable views. I have heard you quote *Ecrasez l'infame* with great conviction, a fine persecuting sentiment.

The war provoked an outbreak of persecution directed against those heretics who rejected the religion of nationalism. Conscientious objectors were shot in Germany, in Italy and in Austria, and were imprisoned, rightly I think, in England. Socialists have been persecuted in Italy, and anti-Socialists in Russia. Nothing short of a miracle—and God is sparing of miracles—could have eliminated the persecuting complex from the Christian section of persecuting humanity.

The history of religious persecution is an admirable illustration of the struggle between the Christian heaven and stubborn human nature. At first it seemed as if the spirit of Christianity was destined to triumph. "To put a heretic to death," said St. John Chrysostom, "is an unpardonable crime." "No one ought to be forced into faith," said St. Augustine. The execution of the heretic Priscillian, who had foolishly appealed from the ecclesiastical Council, which

would certainly not have put him to death, to the Imperial Court, which did, provoked an outburst in Christendom. St. Ambrose protested from Milan, and the Pope excommunicated the bishop in whose diocese the execution had taken place.

It was the spread of Catharism which was mainly responsible for a change of policy. The Cathari were a set of perverted cranks. They preached the doctrine of complete non-resistance, a doctrine which might meet with your approval, but which was naturally condemned by those who realised that the spread of this doctrine would have been followed by the conquest of Europe by Mohammedan invaders. This sect also regarded sex as in itself an evil, and even condemned sexual intercourse between a man and his wife. Suicide, as an escape from life, was warmly praised; mothers who atoned for the unforgivable sin of sexual intercourse by starving their children to death were warmly commended. Lea, whose great work on the Inquisition is certainly not biassed in favour of Catholicism, admits that, so far as the Cathari were concerned, "the cause of orthodoxy was the cause of progress and civilisation. Had Catharism become dominant, or even had it been allowed to exist on equal terms, its influence could not have failed to become disastrous."

In my letters to Father Knox I under-estimated the efforts of the Papacy to secure some mitigation of Inquisitorial severity. I cite the following facts from the excellent essay on religious persecution by my friend Christopher Hollis: "In a stern brief of January 29th, 1482, Sixtus IV accused the Inquisitors of having acted in violation of the rules of canonical justice. But for his desire not to wound the prestige of the King and Queen, he would, he said, have dismissed their Inquisitors, and he refused to permit the extension of the Royal Inquisition to the rest of Spain. '*Quia sola clemencia, quæ nos Deo,*' he wrote, '*quantum ipsa natura præstat humana, facit æquales, regem et reginam per viscera D.N.J.C. rogamus et exhortamur ut illum imitantes cujus est proprium misereri semper et parcere . . . parcere velint.*' . . ." Indeed, the Spanish Inquisition was carried out "in the teeth of continual Papal protest, the only result

of which was that on May 10th, 1588, the Council of the Grand Inquisitor refused to take cognisance of any Bulls of dispensation of penitents coming from Rome and denied the right of the Holy See in any way to mitigate the rigour of the policy of the Royal Inquisition."

Now just as the Spanish Inquisition was mainly inspired by fear of the Moors and the Jews, so the horrible outbursts of witch persecution were certainly the result of terror; nor was this terror utterly irrational. You must remember that many of the witches believed in witchcraft as firmly as did their persecutors, and to the best of their ability practised witchcraft. My friend Alec Keiller, who is a great authority on this subject, tells me that in Scotland the witches were often poisoners and abortionists, and as such undoubtedly deserved punishment. You might, by the way, have given the Spanish Inquisition the credit for its enlightened attitude on this subject. It refused to countenance the witch-hunting mania which was spreading all over Europe. "No one," writes Lea, "can appreciate the services which the Inquisition rendered to Spain who has not realised the horrors of the witchcraft trial in which Catholic and Protestant Europe rivalled each other." One may as well give the devil and the Spanish Inquisition their due.

You contrive very cleverly to suggest that witch hunting is a Christian speciality. But surely you must know that witch hunting is one of the most ancient and endemic of all forms of mob hysteria. As late as 1894 two youths in England were convicted for burning an old witch who had refused to effect a cure at their instigation. The persistence of black magic in those areas of the world which are still unconverted to Christianity proves that black magic, like cruelty, is one of those maladies which Christianity has taken a long time to cure and is not, as you imply, a malady for which Christianity is responsible.

You drag into your letter as an afterthought the statement that parsons have objected to the use of anæsthetics in child-birth. We should save space, which we shall badly need, if I could persuade you that I am trying to prove that Christianity is *true*. I am *not* trying to prove that all Christians are intelligent or that all Christians have practised what Christ

preached. There are a great many silly parsons and there are a great many silly scientists and there are a great many silly philosophers and there are a great many silly statesmen. To prove that the Church has opposed anæsthetics in child-birth you will have to cite an authoritative pronouncement and not the silly sermon of a silly parson. Euthanasia is your next line of attack, the opposition to which proceeds mainly from the legal profession, a fact which you have forgotten. You cite a hard case, a man dying of cancer in the throat, but you have forgotten the good old legal maxim, "hard cases make bad laws." Lawyers wisely fear the results which would follow from legalising killing.

A Roman Catholic doctor would solve your particular problem just as any other doctor would solve it. He would relieve the pain by morphia. It would be wrong to administer a dose calculated to kill. It would be right to administer sufficient morphia to keep the patient in a comatose and painless state. Incidentally his life would be shortened, but so long as this was the indirect result rather than the avowed object, no doctor would be guilty of sin in Catholic eyes.

I can't discuss capital punishment at any length. You apparently attack the Christian for keeping virtuous people alive too long, and for failing to keep murderers alive long enough. The modern dogma of the sacredness of human life is based on emotion, not on reason. It is the soul, not life which is sacred. And if the soul does not survive death, human life is no more and no less sacred than cow or cabbage life; if, on the other hand, this life is a preparation for eternity, a criminal who "makes a good end" has more chance of supernatural happiness than a criminal who dies in his sins. I cannot see why either Christian or Humanist should object to a form of punishment which helps to insure the Humanist against murder and the murderer against Hell.

I have just re-read my own attack on the Inquisition in *Difficulties*. I find that I made many points which you did not make, particularly the evil effect of Inquisitorial procedure on criminal law. But my letter was less effective because I did not think it fair to appeal to the emotions. The bare statement that the Inquisition used torture and burnt people alive by the thousand is all that need be said so far as a

*reasoned* case is concerned. You do not strengthen your case by long accounts of torture, though you strengthen its emotional appeal to a certain kind of reader. But I dare say you are right. There is a certain type of reader who reacts violently to such appeals, and who can be trusted to shout "Guilty" before hearing the case for the defence, once you have made him see red by a few choice extracts about Inquisition tortures.

Well, each method has its points. I prefer more facts and less emotion, but then I am a rationalist.

You open up your letter by disclaiming all intention of "sullyng the pages of this book with even a hint of the things Christians have done to each other." A clever touch. I should like your definition of a "hint." You then proceed to pile up horror after horror, leaving the reader to deduce that you are too gentlemanly a controversialist to bludgeon me with the real horrors, which you keep in reserve.

Even if I had the desire, I have not the space to document my pages with examples of non-Christian cruelty. Here we are, halfway through our allotted space and more, and I have not yet begun to state the positive case for Christianity.

The most effective reply to your letter would not be a letter, but an entire book. I should begin by drawing your attention to the paternal nature of all governments before the blessed dawn of Victorian parliamentarianism. Governments which regulated the amusements and the clothes and in some cases even the food of their citizens, naturally considered it necessary to regulate their religious beliefs. Religious toleration is, as you know, a purely modern phenomenon. I should then have to devote at least one letter to questions of criminal procedure. All governments tend to be unnecessarily harsh before the technique of scientific protection has been developed, let alone the technique of cross-examination and the application of that technique to the law of evidence. Fear begets harshness, and crimes the most difficult to discover have always been punished the most severely. The average English reader of to-day knows little history, and forgets the barbarities which stained our own criminal law until comparatively recently; and it would take more than one letter to shake him out of his smug

complacency by reminding him, among other things, of the hideous punishments inflicted for false coining, a crime difficult to detect, in the eighteenth-century criminal code, or of the horrors of colonial transportation. To counteract the effect of your quotations, I should have to take the reader on a world tour, describe the tortures of the Chinese, the refined cruelties of the Indian potentates, the bloody sacrifices of Africa and the ingenious torments of the Red Indian; and I should conclude with well-documented and well-attested examples of tortures employed by American experts in the third degree. Nor could I omit some description of the cruelties to which Christians have been exposed in modern Russia and in modern Mexico. I prefer, however, to state my case more briefly, and my case is summed up as follows.

Man is naturally cruel. The spirit of Christianity is definitely opposed to the spirit of cruelty, and the Inquisition is not the fruit, but the perversion of Christianity. Christianity is a leaven which works slowly, and cruelty was not eradicated from human nature at the Crucifixion. You yourself have admitted that the world needs to-day as never before the practical application of the teaching of Christ, from which it is a fair deduction that you do yourself consider the Inquisition as an evil perversion, rather than as the fruit of Christianity. Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. Lansbury did not waste time defending the Tcheka, and I do not see why you should expect a Christian to defend the Inquisition.

The first part of your letter is an attack on Christians for inflicting pain; the second part an attack on Christ's insistence on the educative value of pain and suffering. No Christian can regard all pain as wholly evil, whereas your whole outlook is coloured by your humanistic horror of pain. Christ insisted on the sin of inflicting pain, and on the virtue of enduring pain. The things that are most worth doing are the things that are hardest to do. The man who has trained himself to bear excruciating pain with a smile achieves a success of greater value than the forms of success to which the world attaches so much importance. Every hospital is the scene of triumphs more glorious than the conquest of Everest or the production of a great work of art. You

remember Regulus: *Atqui sciebat quæ sibi barbarus tortor pararet.* Regulus was a Christian before Christ in his readiness to face death by torture rather than break his vow.

Humanism, with its horror of pain and suffering, and shrill, cowardly cries of protest against God for permitting pain, is like the Levite in the parable who passed by on the other side: Christianity is the good Samaritan. You have dwelt at length on the dark side of Christianity, and it would require a book as long as this one to restore to the reader a proper sense of proportion by summarising all that has been done by Christians to alleviate human suffering. I shall therefore choose one example at random; you will find the story in Father Martindale's book, *What are Saints?*

It is a story of the Renaissance times, of the Renaissance which was a re-birth not only of pagan humanism, but also of pagan inhumanity. The beauty of the body was worshipped, and men averted their eyes from sickness and from suffering. These things were ugly. The hospitals which had flourished in the great ages of faith were neglected, and became plague-spots of moral and physical horror. Camillus, a rough soldier with a passion for gambling, was suddenly converted, and determined to devote his life to the sick. For thirty-six years he dragged himself about on a wounded leg. He suffered from stone and had to wear an iron truss, and for the last year of his life everything he ate made him sick. During those years he worked a twenty-two hours day in the hospitals caring for the sick in the filthiest and most insanitary of conditions. His sympathy was so divine that the roughest of his companions never tired of watching him bend over the beds of sick persons. He was the true founder of the Red Cross, for it was the Red Cross of the Camillans at work which inspired Dunant at Solferino to promote the international Red Cross. Camillus was no Humanist. He laboured not in the name of humanity, but in the name of Christ. "In no other name did Camillus," writes Father Martindale, "labour with unthinkable intensity for those forty years, not ever seeking payment or recognition, career or pension, himself in deadly pain, but living also his personal life of prayer, of penance, of piety and purity."

You are so obsessed with the thought of pain that you



recur again and again to points you have raised in earlier letters and persist, in spite of tediously reiterated correction, in your old travesties of Christian teaching and God's attitude to suffering. Christians do not believe that God is "angry," or that God enjoys inflicting pain either here or in the hereafter. But I cannot go into all that again. All I can do is to recall to your mind the last hours of the Founder of our faith. He died a death more cruel and more protracted than the rack or the stake, and by his choice of the cross he taught us the divine value of suffering uncomplainingly born. Humanism is not much use in the dentist's chair, but Christianity is an anæsthetic whose value you can test in every hospital and on every battlefield. Men have dishonoured Christ by burning Protestants or racking Catholics in his name, but it was the memory of his courage on the cross which helped the martyrs to laugh in the flames or on the rack. Father Bryant went so far as to taunt his tormentors. "Is this all you are able to do? If your racks are nothing more than this, come on with a hundred others for the sake of this cause; for I am able to endure far severer torment for the sake of the Catholic religion." In scores of cases all the refinements of cruelty could only extract from parched lips not the names of those who had given them shelter, but only the words, "as thine arms, O Christ, were extended on the Cross."

Surely with all your hatred of Christianity, you must concede some virtue to a creed which can produce such heroic resistance, and must admit that even pain is not *wholly* evil if such be its fruits.

But Calvary has another side. The crowd of soldiers and curious onlookers who watched Christ's dying agonies was composed of the usual sort of people with the usual assortment of human vices. "And the rulers also derided him, saying, He saved others, let him save himself if he be Christ. And the soldiers also mocked him." And we know Christ's answer: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Do you really think that the God to whom Christ prayed "is always wanting to hurt somebody"? Surely Christ, by this very prayer, meant his followers to remember that God

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will make every possible allowance for weakness, for error, for blindness and for human frailty. Cannot you see that the Catholic doctrine that those only go to hell who "with full knowledge and consent reject God" is a logical deduction from this prayer on the Cross ?

Yours ever,

ARNOLD LUNN.

XX.

COLEG HARLECH,  
HARLECH,  
MERIONETH.  
July 20th.

DEAR LUNN,

I. Bishop Hedley says the fire of hell is real; Father Martindale says it isn't. Bishop Hedley is backed up by most Catholics that I have ever heard of, the *Catholic Encyclopædia* and your late opponent Father Knox. There is apparently no doctrine *de fide* on the subject, the Pope and the General Councils remaining discreetly silent.

I can only reiterate the exasperated questions of my first letter, "What *do* Christians believe? Is there in existence any agreed body of doctrine to which they all as Christians subscribe? Is there, indeed, such a thing as a Christian cosmogony at all?", and congratulate you on your fortunate position in being able to jettison at will any reputed Christian doctrine which is more than usually obnoxious to criticism or repugnant to kindness and common sense, and then to produce reasonably good authority to justify the jettisoning. There seems to be reasonably good authority for pretty well any and every possible variety of Christian doctrine. Your position is, indeed, admirably adapted for controversial purposes!

The truths of this "divine science" are, you say, never coercive. That they are not coercive I agree, but there may be a reason for this other than the one you give—namely, that they yield themselves only as the reward of hard work and research, just as there may be a quite different and perfectly simple explanation of the facts that most of his contemporaries did not recognise Christ for what, begging the question, you say "He was," and that the few who did, did so only with difficulty. I leave it to you to guess what the explanation is. Isn't it, by the way, a little hard that the immense majority of human beings, owing to their mistake in getting born too early or too far away, have never been given a chance of dis-

## CHRISTIANITY FAILS TO IMPROVE CONDUCT

covering these truths? I should not like to think that God has favourites; but it looks rather like it.

You excuse the Inquisition by saying that man, being "fallen," is by nature cruel, and always has been. No doubt! But Christianity, if it exercised the influence you claim for it, should have made him better instead of giving him at once an outlet and a sanction for his cruelty. "Corruptio optimi pessima," you know, and assuming that it is, as you think, the best, Christianity in its corruption has harmed the most. If Christianity is to establish its claim to the respect you demand for it, then I demand a higher standard of conduct from Christians than from others, especially when they are, as they say, and as the Inquisition said, going about God's business and doing their master's work. I don't, in short, expect them to behave like fiends, nor, when they do, am I prepared to accept their behaviour as evidence of anything but the complete inefficacy of their religion to influence their conduct. If Christianity fails to improve the conduct of those who profess it—and it really does fail; look, for instance, at the last war after two thousand years of preaching love and non-resistance!—why should I accept its claim to influence me?

Your letter is often irrelevant because it misapprehends the limited objective of mine. I have been arguing not that the Inquisition was or was not worse than other contemporary institutions, but merely that the effects of Christianity have been inimical to the happiness of mankind. The Inquisition was one of these effects, and that it has caused to occur an incalculable amount of human suffering you nowhere deny. Nor do you deny—in fact you do not deal with—my charge, that this suffering was inflicted for trivial and purely partisan reasons, that men and women were put horribly to death for not believing that evil spirits inhabit human bodies, for misunderstanding the mystery of the Trinity, for doubting the verbal inspiration of scripture or the absolute authority of Rome, that orthodoxy was exalted above holiness, and noble and courageous men tortured to death by fanatical pedants.

All these things were done in the name of Christianity, and in sum they make a formidable indictment. As an answer to

this indictment, that one of the effects of Christianity has been to increase human suffering, much of your letter is irrelevant. It is irrelevant that many of those tormented by the Inquisition were Jews, or that its ferocity was due to fear, fear of the Moors. Jews, I presume, feel as much as Christians! It is not only irrelevant; it is largely untrue. I drew most of my illustrations from the Netherlands where the fires of the Inquisition were fiercest, and its victims most numerous. The Netherlands were destitute of Moors and not unduly infested with the Jews. If it required no Moors and few Jews to stimulate the Inquisition's activities in the Netherlands, why should their presence excuse them in Spain?

You say that Pope Sixtus IV tried to put the brake on the Inquisitors. Very well, then—Pope, or rather Popes, for Pope!—"The Inquisition was established by the Papacy, which alone was qualified to do so," which is the very first sentence in a book on the Inquisition published in 1906 by the Monseigneur Celestin Donais, Bishop of Beauvais and Catholic apologist. Reading on, I find that it was a Pope who in 1252 insisted on the employment of torture, which was again expressly authorised by Innocent IV and Urban IV.

Finally, if the Inquisition is not the fruit but the perversion of Christianity, I do not see why you should be so anxious to whitewash it. It is a little ingenuous to end by writing off as a perversion an institution which one has devoted two-thirds of a longish letter to defending.

You stigmatise my refusal "to sully the pages of this book with even a hint of the things Christians have done to each other" as a clever controversial trick. But please notice that I don't sully them! I give no details of tortures, being content to refer our readers to Swayne's book. It is no dwelling upon horrors that arouses the emotional atmosphere you deplore; the bare recital of a few typical facts suffices.

II. I come now to the last part of my case.

I have to argue that the influence of Christianity has impeded human progress.

I shall divide what I have to say into two main parts. The first will be concerned with the attitude of Christianity to the growth of human knowledge, as expressed more particu-

## THE CHURCH'S RECEPTION OF NEW KNOWLEDGE

larly in philosophy and science; the second, with its attitude to those improvements in human life which result from this growth and which we call civilisation. In concluding the second part of the indictment I shall deal in some little detail with the Christian attitude to sex and the body, a subject which will receive a letter to itself.

First, then, I take the growth of human knowledge. Ever since its establishment the Christian Church has opposed that free enquiry of the human mind which has produced philosophy and science, which has extended the bounds of human understanding, increased human power, and changed the whole texture of human life as an infringement of her prerogative. Inevitably, in the light of her claims, the Church considered herself the repository of divine wisdom; therefore, she knew all that it was necessary and salutary to know. It followed that other knowledge must be either impious or unnecessary. What could be more obvious? And so, when one looks back over history, one realises that there is scarcely any discovery which science has made for human advancement and happiness which churchmen and theologians have not violently opposed. I have already related how only a few hundred years ago priests and theologians were burning by the thousand men and women whom they believed to be in league with the devil, and whom they denounced as the causes of illnesses and thunderstorms and anything else for which they could not otherwise account. To suggest the slightest alleviation of the prolonged torture of these victims was denounced by educated and cultured clerics of all denominations alike, and practically to a man, as "an offence to God."

But not content with burning each other, the exponents of Christianity burnt the men who discovered the earth's motion, burnt the men who made the first tentative beginnings of physics and chemistry, burnt the men who laid the foundations of our medical knowledge.

When Newton first proclaimed the law of gravitation, orthodox pulpits levelled their guns against him in anger and consternation. John Wesley said that Newton's theory "tended to infidelity." The same divine averred that "giving up belief in witchcraft is, in effect, giving up the Bible."

Sir Thomas Browne argued, in *Religio Medici*, that to deny witches was to be an atheist.

When science made it possible to fight smallpox epidemics, churchmen opposed the necessary sanitary measures as an attempt to escape merited punishment, and denounced vaccination as "an offence to God." When chloroform was invented, they opposed its use, especially in childbirth—had not God laid a primæval curse upon woman?—and denounced it as "an offence to God." A hundred years ago, when the discovery of the steam engine made railways possible, the clergy preached against them as "unnatural" and a sin against God. The following is from an American newspaper of the time:

"You are welcome to use the schoolroom to debate proper questions in, but such things as railroads and telegraphs are impossibilities and rank infidelity. There is nothing in the Word of God about them. If God had designed that His intelligent creatures should travel at the frightful speed of fifteen miles an hour by steam He would have foretold it through His Holy Prophets. It is a device of Satan to lead immortal souls down to Hell."

In the eighteenth century the clergy opposed the use of lightning conductors as an interference with God's intentions; in the sixteenth they opposed the introduction of forks for use at table, and denounced them from the pulpit!

I turn from the Church's attitude to those inventions by which human lives have been brightened and human pain alleviated, to the more abstract sphere of philosophical speculation and scientific thought.

If I were a conscientious advocate, anxious to do my full duty by my case, I should pause for some time in the philosophical realm. I should tell you, for example, of the unfortunate effect which theological influence had upon the thought of Descartes. This good man, appalled by the fate of Galileo, withdrew from publication his more advanced writings and was frightened into concluding his famous *Principles* with a declaration of complete submission to the Church. "Lest I should presume too far," he wrote, "I affirm nothing, but submit all these my opinions to the

judgment of the Church." If Descartes had just said what he wanted to say, and then affirmed his readiness to withdraw it if the Church didn't like it, no great harm would have been done. In fact, however, he was too completely a child of his age, or, if you like, too good a son of the Church for that. His thought bears witness to a perpetual conflict between what he had been taught to believe and what his reason had discovered, a conflict between religion and science, which led him to introduce a sharp division between the two worlds in which they were respectively held to operate. Science operated in the world of matter, religion in that of spirit. For example, the recently discovered science of mechanics showed that the movements of matter could be calculated mathematically. As the movements of matter include our bodily acts, it looked very much as if the movements of the body could be calculated mathematically, as if, in short, the body was determined. This result was distasteful to Descartes because it was repugnant to theology. Consequently he introduced a sharp distinction between the body and the mind, the body belonging to the world of science being determined by natural laws, the mind being subject to God and endowed with free will. It is not too much to say that, just as most subsequent philosophers have striven to overcome Descartes' dualism of spirit and matter, so most subsequent psychology has been concerned to bridge the disastrous gulf which he introduced between mind and body, a gulf which he himself saw no alternative but to fill with an infinite series of divine miracles, one of which occurred every time a mind and a body appeared to interact.

I should write again of Leibnitz with his pre-established harmony, according to which everything that happened in the world must be the best possible of all the things that could have happened, and must have the best possible of all possible results. God, you see, was, for him, the Supreme Monad who had established the world order, and, since God was all good, it must follow—what could be more obvious?—that the world order was all good too. Voltaire's *Candide* seems to be a final commentary on this conception which, repugnant to reason, is grounded in the



faith of the theologian rather than in the intellect of the philosopher.

"Nothing," says Hume, after completely demolishing every argument in favour of the immortality of the soul, "could set in a fuller light the infinite obligation which mankind has to divine revelation, since we find that no other medium could ascertain this great and important truth." The cat-like touch of ironic malice which is just perceptible through the extreme mildness of the utterance, seems to me to afford exactly the right comment upon the attempts of philosophers to make the conclusions of reason square with the requirements of faith.

I could, I say, tell you in detail of these botched speculations of great minds hampered by the swaddling clothes of a traditional theology, but I refrain for two reasons. First, philosophy is my job, and you might suspect that I am illegitimately "coming the professional" over you—that is, utilising my familiarity with the subject to establish conclusions derogatory to the faith which a more impartial treatment might refuse to endorse. In the second place, our public is not interested in the influence of Christian theology upon philosophy, and will be much more entertained by the exhibition which the Churches made of themselves over the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century.

This is no place for a revival of the old evolutionary controversy at which we have both already glanced. But, if you will promise not to let your sense of humour desert you, I cannot refrain from regaling you with one or two specimens of the Christian Church's reaction to new ideas. In order that you may not disdain these as being partial or prejudiced on the ground that they are drawn from tainted sources, I shall take the few illustrations with which I propose to amuse you from Christian publications.

The *locus classicus* for these gems of ecclesiastical humour is of course the controversy which followed the appearance of Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

"Great divines . . . maintained that the Genesis stories of the Creation and the Fall, and the Incarnation of our Lord, must stand or fall together: that if Evolution were accepted 'the entire scheme of man's salvation must col-

## THE CHURCH REACTS TO EVOLUTION

lapse,' that the stories of Lot's wife and Jonah in their literal meaning were 'vital' to Christianity."<sup>1</sup>

In the early stages of the *Essays and Reviews* controversy, Bishop Wilberforce of Oxford declared that, if men were persuaded to "accept allegorically, or as a parable, or poetry, or legend, the story of a serpent tempter, of an ass speaking with a man's voice, of an arresting of the earth's motion, or of a reversal of its motion," they were in danger of being "robbed unawares of the very foundations of the Faith."<sup>2</sup>

The conception of God on which such an attitude was based is well described in the following passage:

"God was only supposed to be at work when mystery enshrouded all. Just as a conjuror, to maintain his reputation, must conceal how he does his tricks, so it seemed to be supposed that God, to retain His majesty, must shroud all His methods in mists and darkness. To probe the mystery was impious, to discover anything was to dethrone Him."<sup>3</sup>

The establishment of evolution, as these quotations show, was—there is no use blinking the fact—a great blow to the Church. It wounded it in its most sensitive place, its pride. The Church had always aspired to be the sole repository of truth concerning God's methods of creation, including the origin and nature of man. The Bible, it held, was divinely inspired; the Bible, therefore, must be true, and the Church was the official interpreter of its teaching. Now it turned out that what the Bible said was not true, and that what the Church had been teaching was wrong. Not only was this embarrassing in itself, but it was very disquieting in its effects, since, if the Bible and the Church were wrong about the origin of man, they might be wrong about other things too. Instead of holding that all truth is God's truth, and that the discovery of it must therefore be to His greater glory, the attitude of the Church was that, if evolution really was true—and one could only hope that it was not—it was highly discreditable, and, as with the arrangements so unfortunately adopted by the Almighty for the perpetuation of the species,

<sup>1</sup> *Liberal Evangelicalism*, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from *Modern Churchman*, January, 1930, p. 579.

<sup>3</sup> *Liberal Evangelicalism*, *ibid.*

the less said about it the better. The Church, you see, had always taught that man was a sort of degenerate angel, and it was a great shock to the ecclesiastical mind to learn that he was only a promoted ape; unaccountably, I cannot help thinking, for surely it is better to be a promoted anything than a degenerate anything else. However, a great shock it was, and the Church's reception of the news was symbolised by the old lady who greeted the Darwinian hypothesis with the remark: "Descended from monkeys? My dear, I trust that it is not true; but if it is, let us pray that it may not become widely known."

Others, while conceding that the evidence for evolution was from God, held that it was not trustworthy but false, the falsehood being deliberately manufactured by the Almighty for His own purposes. Thus their solicitude for the Bible led them to traduce the character of its author.

Pre-eminent in this field is the celebrated theory of Sir Edmund Gosse's father, a highly distinguished marine biologist, who, faced with the fossil evidence for evolution, announced that God had made the world complete with fossils, the fossils being inserted to delude the scientist. The world had, in fact, been created by a series of successive acts as stated in Genesis, but created such as it would have been if it had evolved continuously and slowly!

Others held that "days" in the first chapter of Genesis did not mean days, but immense periods of time of length unspecified. Others, again, that the account was poetry, and therefore only "poetically" or "spiritually" true, whatever that means. Perhaps the most popular way of meeting the situation, when once it had been accepted, was to represent the process of evolution which Darwin had established as a progress. Man was later than the *amœba* in the evolutionary time scale; therefore he was higher. A very natural view to take on the part of those who were both judge and jury in their own cause—man, after all, has written all the books—but whether the *amœba* would agree with it is not known.

Now, of course, the Church has learned better and has abandoned most of its old antagonism to evolution; so much so, that we find ingenious Christian apologists such as yourself actually maintaining that the Church never really op-

### THREE STAGES OF RECEPTION

posed the doctrine at all, and even hinting that it knew it all along. Looking back over the Church's record in the evolution controversy in the light of these hints of yours, one has the impression of a retreating army fighting a series of rear-guard actions, giving up one position after another, as it is pressed ever backwards by the forces of attack, and then, when it has been driven within its own gates, stoutly maintaining that it has not been fighting at all. There are, it seems, three stages in the Church's reception of a new scientific discovery: First, "It's nonsense!"; secondly, "It's contrary to Holy Scripture!"; thirdly, "But of course! We knew it all the time." But, "knowing it all the time," Christians nevertheless hold beliefs incompatible with what they know. "Do you accept the first chapter of Genesis as historical?" the readers of the *News Chronicle* (then the *Daily News*) were asked in the celebrated 1926 questionnaire. "No," said some 70 per cent. of them, "we do not." "Do you regard the Bible as inspired by God?" they were asked next. "Yes," said some 80 per cent., "we do." I can make nothing of these figures, unless they mean that many Christians consider that God inspired the Bible, but caused its authors to tell lies in the first chapter.

This equivocal attitude of the Church, an attitude which opposes what is new as long as it can, and then takes advantage of the shortness of men's memories to take credit for what it has always opposed, characterises all the later phases of its history.

Consider the record of the Church of England in the last century, when it had largely ceased to be persecuting and had become merely reactionary. Every claim for justice, every appeal to reason, every movement for equality, every proposal to relieve the poverty, to mitigate the savagery, or to enlighten the ignorance of the masses was morally certain to encounter the opposition of the Church. From many similar instances I cite a few at random. The clergy of the Established Church either actively opposed or were completely indifferent to the abolition of the slave trade. Even the pious Churchman Wilberforce, writing in 1832, was compelled to admit that "the Church clergy have been shamefully lukewarm in the cause of slavery abolition."

They opposed the movement for the abolition of the Rotten Boroughs, prophesying that, if the Reform Bill of 1832 was carried, it would lead to the destruction of the Establishment. They opposed, in 1806, Whitbread's Bill to establish parish schools in England out of the rates, the Archbishop complaining that the proposal would take too much power from the clergy. State education was indeed persistently and at all times opposed by the Church, because "it would enable the labouring classes to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity."<sup>1</sup>

In the 'thirties and 'forties the Church clergy of all sections denounced the Chartists with as much vigour as their successors seventy years later were to denounce strikers and Socialists, while the Tractarians preached against all those who "taught the people to rail against their social superiors." In the 'seventies Joseph Arch found the rural clergy, with some few exceptions, actively hostile to his movement to procure a living wage for the half-starved agricultural labourers.

I have a habit of jotting down on the blank pages which publishers are so good as to include at the end of books references to whatever in the book has particularly struck me. An informal private index results. At the end of my copy of Sir G. M. Trevelyan's *British History in the Nineteenth Century* I find a large number of entries under "Clergy," each of which relates to an occasion on which clergymen are described as opposing something or other which was subsequently adopted and today is taken for granted as part of our national life. I see that after a number of these entries I have been content to note merely the page reference followed by "The clergy 'at it' again," the safe presumption being that there is only one kind of activity for which the clergy get a mention in the later history books, that of opposition, generally ineffective. And this is, in fact, the chief impression one gets of them.

Nor are things very different now. In a variety of ways the modern State in its spasmodic efforts at progress and betterment is still opposed by the dead hand of Mediævalism,

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Giddy, afterwards President of the Royal Society under the name of Gilbert, in 1807.

## THE CHURCH OPPOSES EDUCATION

which is also the hand of the Churches. Take, for instance, the question of education. There are few educational experts in England to whom the raising of the school-leaving age is not a matter of ultimate principle. There are, I believe, even fewer teachers who would not, given the choice, prefer to teach in a State school rather than one endowed by a religious denomination. It is a matter of common knowledge that neither in equipment nor in buildings, neither in personnel nor in quality of work, can the religious schools equal those controlled directly by the State. Every development, in short, of purely secular education is a gain from the point of view of the quality of the intellectual standards applied. Yet the relationship between the Churches and the State in England compels the sacrifice of the purpose education seeks to fulfil to ends with the detailed substance of which the State, by its very nature, can have no connection, with the result that the State has to put up with the sort of intrigues which made the clergy notorious at the time of Sir Charles Trevelyan's 1930 Education Bill, when the different religious denominations contrived to prevent the raising of the school-leaving age, because it would have involved them either in submitting to an extension of State control in their schools or in an expenditure on additional educational equipment from their own resources.

Nor is this the extent of the wrong. It is bad enough that children should leave school earlier than they might otherwise have done because of religious jealousies and sectarian disputes; it is equally bad that persons like myself should be taxed to support the giving in State schools of religious instruction in which they do not believe; it is bad that our children must receive such instruction on pain of having their lives made a misery by the school authorities, not to mention their schoolfellows' intolerance of any kind of oddness, if their parents insist on special exemption; but worst of all is the spectacle of the virtual blackmail of Parliament by religious enthusiasts who are prepared to sacrifice educational progress to securing for their faith public money out of all proportion to the voluntary contributions they could secure from their devotees.

Or take the case of the Blasphemy Laws. So long as I do

not provoke a breach of the peace, I ought to be allowed to criticise freely and without limit the faiths men choose to hold. And so, speaking broadly, I can, if I am an educated man couching my language in the terms of polite controversy by which these letters are distinguished and adorned. But, if I denounce God in the vernacular and the public park, and infuriated Christians break my head for it, I can be indicted under the Blasphemy Laws for causing a breach of the public peace. This means, in effect, that the law is normally only brought into operation against comparatively humble men, except in war-time, when, as I have already pointed out, people are particularly zealous for the honour of the Almighty. Thus, in the last war, men were simultaneously in prison under the Blasphemy Laws for attacking the Christian religion and as conscientious objectors for drawing attention to the teaching of Christ; the implication of which seems to be that in war-time it is equally illegal not to profess the Christian religion and to advocate what that religion teaches.

Meanwhile, although no Christian can be brought before a court for attacking Atheists, it still remains possible to prosecute an Atheist for an attack upon Christians, and owing to the influence of the Church there seems little hope of getting the law altered. Indeed, in all sorts of unexpected directions the Churches exert their repressive influence over our lives.

Our educational system is hampered and the advancement of knowledge retarded because the Church of England and the Church of Rome demand and receive their separate schools. Our prisons must be equipped with chaplains, although there is no evidence that any chaplain has ever reformed any criminal. Every regiment and every vessel must have its representative of God in order to assure soldiers and sailors that the killing for which they are being trained is being done with divine sanction. At Oxford and Cambridge every college still has its chaplain and its don in Holy Orders, while at Oxford every theological professor must still be a priest in the Church of England, presumably on the assumption that Anglican theology is the only kind which has any pretensions to being true. We can get money from the prison commissioners for religious services, but not for adult education.

## GLOOM OF SUNDAY

But it is in its influence upon the English Sunday that the modern Church is seen in its most characteristic rôle. Who is there who does not know the depressing drabness, the squalor, the dim pallor, the sheer dullness of Sunday in an ordinary English provincial town? The trams do not run until after midday, nor do the buses. The cinemas, shops and restaurants are closed, and the only activity in the streets is exhibited by the processions of complacent-looking persons marching in their ugly and uncomfortable clothes to and from divine service. At the street corners are little bands of men and women waiting with pathetic lassitude for the pubs to open. Those responsible for the condition of the English Sabbath deplore the drinking habits of the working classes; they do not realise that they are themselves responsible for most of what they deplore by making the Sabbath so intolerably dull that drink is the only known way of alleviating a boredom that cannot be endured. Drink, in fact, is the shortest cut out of the English Sunday.

Now for this miasma of dullness, this interdict upon rational amusement and healthy activity—in a town of which I am thinking the open-air baths, the municipal golf course and the public tennis courts are all closed on Sundays, the one day of the week upon which most people can play on them—the Churches are responsible. The Jews laid it down that men should not work on Saturdays; the Christian Churches have interpreted this rule to mean that they shall not play on Sundays. This, they aver, is God's will, for, as usual, they know exactly how God wishes people to behave on Sunday. They know, for instance, that He does not like them to play games, to drink, to amuse themselves or even, apparently, to travel. When it was first proposed to run Sunday excursions from London to Cambridge the University authorities were horrified, and the Vice-Chancellor of the University addressed the following letter to the Directors of the Eastern Counties Railway, the old name of the Great Eastern:

“The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge presents his compliments to the Directors of the Eastern Counties Railway and begs to inform them that he has learnt



with regret that it is the intention of the Directors of the Eastern Counties Railway to run excursion trains to Cambridge on the Lord's Day, with the object of attracting foreigners and undesirable characters to the University of Cambridge on that sacred day.

"The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge wishes to point out to the Directors of the Eastern Counties Railway that such a proceeding would be as displeasing to Almighty God as it is to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge."<sup>1</sup>

I draw your attention particularly to the last two lines, and ask you to note how often it happens that the Will of God, which eminent Christians have taken it upon themselves to interpret, has by an odd coincidence been identical with their own. To-day it is God's will that we should not go to the cinema on Sunday afternoon, or to the theatre at any time, although we may visit picture galleries or a museum. We may run but may not bathe, play chess but not cards, eat and drink at home but not, generally speaking, in public.

At least, we may not do these things if our incomes fall below a certain level. If I happen to be a poor man, relying upon municipal facilities for my games, I find courts and links closed against me; but if I am rich enough to belong to a club, I can play tennis and golf all day; from which I infer that causing the impact of long, thin pieces of matter upon small round ones, countenanced by God in the well-to-do, displeases Him in those who are not; just as the public immersion of the body, which is not apparently thought to displease God on a weekday, becomes wicked on a Sunday in the case of bodies whose owners do not keep a balance at the bank.

In face of the nonsense which these regulations and distinctions make of the Lord's Day observance, it is impossible to deny oneself the fun of asking those who decree them how they know that God wills these things; and, since they are unlikely to answer, I will give myself the pleasure of putting the question to you. It is, I suppose, because they are not quite so sure as they would like to be, that they use other

<sup>1</sup> C. R. Fay, *Great Britain from Adam Smith to the Present Day*, p. 201.

## THE CHURCH RESPONSIBLE FOR GLOOM

arguments to reinforce God's will. For example, it is said that Sunday amusements would mean more work, which scarcely seems a sound objection in the light of our two and a half million unemployed. Mr. Martin, secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society, opposed the experimental Sunday opening of the Hyde Park Lido on the ground that there was no real demand for the facilities, although on the Sunday immediately following this pronouncement—last Sunday week, to be precise—there was a queue two hundred yards long of people trying to secure admittance to the Lido, which was filled to capacity throughout the whole period during which it had been experimentally opened.

Or it is said that God will not mind people seeing and hearing photographs talk on a Sunday, if a proportion of the money they pay to do so is given to hospitals, although they may not see and hear the flesh and blood originals of the photographs on any condition. And so on, and so on. . . .

And all this mass of hypocrisy and stupidity, and obscurantist superstition and sheer, stark, staring folly is inspired and kept going by the Churches. Can you wonder that, looking back over their record in the past and considering their activities in the present, I find their main function to be one of obstruction and impediment? They have—the conclusion is unescapable—confined and oppressed the thought of mankind, hampered and curtailed its enjoyment and militated against its social and political progress. The high-water mark of these obstructive and repressive activities is the Church's attitude to sex and the body, which demands a letter to itself.

Yours ever,  
CYRIL JOAD.

## XXI.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
KENT.  
July 26th.

MY DEAR JOAD,

Again and again in this correspondence you ignore or forget a correction on some point of fact, and return to your old charge without deigning to notice my rejoinders. The essence of good controversy is to avoid mere repetition. "All A is B." "But you forget that some A is C." "Yes, but all C is B" is intelligent controversy.

"All A is B." "But you forget that some A is C." "Ah, but all A is B!" is unintelligent controversy.

Thus in reply to your "exasperated question, What do Christians believe?" I can only repeat that all Christians believe that Christ was God, that all Roman Catholics believe those doctrines which have been defined as *de fide*—doctrines such as the Virgin Birth, Transubstantiation, the doctrine of Purgatory, the Immaculate Conception, the Infallibility of the Pope, etc.—and that Roman Catholics are free to differ on points which the Church has left open for discussion, such as the problem of evolution, and the nature of that *pæna sensus* which is part of the punishment of Hell.

Again, it is tiresome that you should blandly ignore the tribute which I quoted from a learned Protestant historian to the great educational and cultural work of the monastic orders, and commit to paper the following sentence: "Inevitably, in the light of her claims, the Church considered herself the repository of divine wisdom: therefore, she knew all that it was necessary and salutary to know. It followed that all other knowledge must be either impious or unnecessary."

Mr. Chesterton once wrote an essay, "Don'ts for Dogmatists: or Things I am tired of," an essay in which he pilloried a series of popular charges against the Church. "Do not," he concluded, "I implore you, talk such bosh. I supplicate you not to talk such bosh. Utterly and absolutely

abolish all such bosh, and we may yet begin to discuss these public questions properly."

It is tragic that a man with your education and your position should repeat these reckless and foolish charges against the Church. What hope has the truth of making headway among the humbler people who attend the W.E.A. lectures, if a man of your standing can persist, in spite of correction, in such obstinate ignorance?

Please begin by re-reading carefully page 139. Then pause to reflect that all secular learning in Europe was monastic in origin. Study the history of your own university, Oxford. Remember that we owe much of our knowledge of classical literature to the preservation of manuscripts by the monks and to the patient labours of clerical copyists. Remember that the revival of medicine in the Middle Ages was due to the Church. Rahere, who founded Barts, was a Court Jester who was converted and became a monk. Read the life of Canon Copernicus, who anticipated Galileo, and whose great book, *De Revolutionibus Orbium Cælestium*, owed its publication to the financial backing of two Cardinals. This book, by the way, was dedicated to the Pope Paul III. Neither he nor the nine Popes that followed him objected to the Copernican theory. Clearly you have never heard of the admirable researches of French priests on prehistoric man. Clearly you know nothing of the contributions of the Jesuits to astronomy. Clearly you do not realise that of the great names in science, the majority have been faithful and honoured members of the churches, Roman and non-Roman.

"The exponents of Christianity burnt the men who discovered the earth's motion, burnt the men who made the first tentative beginnings of physics and chemistry, burnt the men who laid the foundation of medical knowledge."

"I supplicate you not to talk such bosh." Name these martyrs. Name any chemist, astronomer, physicist, doctor who was burnt because the Church objected to the victim's chemical, astronomical, scientific or medical theories.

Galileo got into mild trouble because he asserted that Scripture had erred. As Cardinal Bellarmine said at the time, he would not have been condemned had he been content to show that his system explained celestial phenomena.

Galileo's "long life," wrote M. Bertrand, the Secretary of the French Academy of Sciences, "considered as a whole, must be looked upon as the most serene and enviable in the history of science."

Why should the Church desire to burn men "who laid the foundations of medical knowledge"? Popes are not immune by virtue of their office from indigestion or other diseases, and a sick Pope is as anxious as you or I to obtain the best medical attention. Have you heard of the great Papal medical schools, and are you familiar with the history of the City hospitals?

In my last letter I remarked that the views of silly parsons who objected to anæsthetics were as relevant to our debate as the views of silly atheists. You ignore my protest and repeat for the *n*th time your remark about anæsthetics—no references given of course—and favour me with further extracts from silly sermons.

There is something curiously provincial in your criticisms of Christianity. As I have lived almost half my life abroad I find it difficult to adjust myself to meet an attack based, in the main, on extracts from Anglican divines in the nineteenth century, or to reply adequately to a critic who has no sense of scale, and who imagines that the British Sunday, which, like Mr. C. E. M. Joad, is the product of English Puritanism, has any relevance to the question we are discussing.

If you reflect on the vast numbers of the clergy, and on the fact that most of them preach at least one sermon on Sundays, you would cease to be surprised that some of these sermons are silly. And remember the sermons which you quote have attracted attention precisely because they are silly. You have a great admiration for Father d'Arcy. Indeed, you have confessed that when you feel inclined to relegate the species parson to a sub-species of the human race, you are restrained from this severe verdict by your respect for that eminent Jesuit. Your views about Bishop Barnes do not differ notably from my own. Now Bishop Barnes is always reported in the Press and Father d'Arcy is never reported, but it would be as absurd to judge English Christianity of to-day by Bishop Barnes as to judge nineteenth-century Christianity by the parsons whom you quote.

The Duke of Wellington violently objected to railway trains, as did most of the English squirearchy. What does this prove? That Dukes and Generals are fools or that human nature is intensely conservative and resents all change?

Violent attacks on the Great Exhibition were made in Parliament on the ground that it would attract large numbers of foreigners who would never go away again. Had those attacks been made by Bishops, down they would have gone in your scrap-book to be used as a proof that Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead.

As to evolution, a subject which recurs again and again (it really is time that you made your final exodus from Genesis), it is untrue to say that the Church began by remarking "It's nonsense," and ended by saying, "We knew it all the time." The Church has never made an authoritative pronouncement on evolution, either favourable or adverse. And, whatever may be the case with Bishop Barnes, the Church is certainly not so foolish as to proclaim that evolution has been proved. Evolution is a plausible, perhaps a probable theory, but it is a theory which is riddled with difficulties. As that great scientist and convinced evolutionist Yves Delage said: "I am, however, persuaded that one is or is not a transformist, not so much for reasons deduced from natural history as for motives based on personal philosophic opinions. If one takes one's stand upon the exclusive ground of facts, it must be acknowledged that the formation of one species from another species has not been demonstrated at all."

You ought to read *The Case against Evolution* by an American scientist. You will find its arguments summarised in the preface to the new edition of my *Flight from Reason*. You, as a philosopher, should not fall into the vulgar error of the man in the street, and try to pass off as an undisputed fact a plausible theory.

"The Church," you say, "has always taught that man was a sort of degenerate angel." Has it? This is news to me.

It is grotesque to represent the simian origin of man as proven. "The only statement," said that great scientist Reincke, "consistent with her dignity that science can make

is that she knows nothing about the origin of man." Wallace, who formulated the theory of Natural Selection independently of Darwin, held that there are "three stages in the development of the organic world when some new cause or power must necessarily have come into action, the first when the first living cell was created, the second when the animal kingdom separated from the vegetable kingdom, and the third at the creation of Man." This is not very different to the teaching of the Church that Man owes his creation to a supernatural act.

Science is rapidly moving away from the crude dogmatism of the Victorian evolutionists. But for goodness' sake don't let us embark on an argument about evolution. I am reserving that for my book with Professor Haldane, as it is more interesting to argue about evolution with a scientist.

Haldane, by the way, regards the evolution of man from lower animals as "rather more probable than the existence of Cerdic the Saxon, but less so than that of Queen Anne."

Note the contrast between the dogmatism of the man in the street and the tentative caution of a real scientist.

I am touched by your chivalrous reluctance to "come the professional philosopher" over me, but your reference to Descartes, etc., fails to convince me that my unsophisticated *fides carbonarii* has much to fear from your metaphysical equipment. I agree with you that Descartes' writings betray a sense of conflict, the conflict between the Christianity of his upbringing and the mechanistic materialism towards which his views tended. Descartes, by the way, is the spiritual father of Behaviourism, that last deformity of ignoble minds. It is difficult, as Descartes found, to reconcile Christian sense with materialistic nonsense. Consistency might be attained, as you seem to suggest, by sacrificing the sense, but even materialists find it difficult to be consistently nonsensical. Intelligence is always breaking in. I find the same sense of strain and conflict in the writings of men like Huxley and Haeckel. The attempt to adjust stubborn facts to their atheistic prejudices transformed even Huxley, by nature a clear writer, into a confused and troubled thinker. Christian philosophy is alone consistent and coherent, and

no Christian will quarrel with you for criticising the contradictions of writers like Descartes and Hume.

If you study the history of science, you will realise that the real conflict is not the conflict between religion and science, which exists only in your imagination, but the conflict between science and the scientists. Galileo attracted attention precisely because his case was a "sport." Had he been persecuted by organised scientific opinion, we should never have heard of him. His name would have been one among the noble company of martyrs who have suffered for science at the hands of scientists. "The truth seeker," writes Professor Jordan in his *Footsteps of Evolution*, "has had to struggle for his physical life. Each acquisition of truth has been resisted with the full force of the inertia of satisfaction with preconceived ideas."

Your own Samuel Butler, as you know, was the victim of a studied boycott because he was rash enough to criticise Darwinian orthodoxy. For further evidence read the lives of Harvey, who discovered the circulation of the blood; of Stenson, who discovered that the heart is a muscle; of Ohm, who discovered the law of electrical resistance; and read what their scientific contemporaries said of Pasteur, Jenner and a host of other great pioneers.

Your whole attack on Christianity is really an attack on human nature. Man is by nature cruel, avaricious, and suspicious of new ideas. You discover to your surprise that some Christians are reactionary and that some are silly. It would be just as easy to discredit science if one chose to keep a scrap-book of reactionary scientific pronouncements. If you had wished to present a balanced picture of British Christianity you would have included quotations from the Free Churches, which have been the strength of the Liberal party, just as the Church of England has been in the main Conservative. But your object was not a balanced picture, and your scrap-book is intended to provide you, not with the materials for a philosophic verdict, but with ammunition for your attack on the Faith.

An amusing illustration of your habit of attributing to the Church the weakness common to humanity at large is your quotation from Giddy. Mr. Giddy desired to withhold edu-



cation from the labouring classes, which was very wrong of him. When we indignantly demand further details of this ultramontane cleric, we discover that he was the President of the Royal Society. Why don't you quote his views to prove that scientists have invariably opposed all human progress?

The last part of your letter is devoted to proving, once again, that the Christian conclusions cannot be deduced from humanist premises. If Christ did not rise from the dead, clearly we ought not to teach small children that he did, or to attempt the salvation of convicts by preaching a myth. But if Christianity is true, it is a disaster of tragic magnitude that your views should be represented as widely as they are among the teachers of our youth.

Your uncritical faith in the mystic virtues of compulsory education is very touching. "It has only taken fifty years," writes Mr. Douglas Jerrold, "of shoddy philosophy and systematic compulsory education to force out literature and scholarship from the markets of at least one third of the world." And Mr. Jerrold, who speaks with authority as a publisher, reminds us that works of scholarship which before the war sold by the thousand to-day sell by the hundred.

The Christian creed is the first to go, but the code and culture which are derived from that creed will not long survive the Faith.

One word more. May I provide you with a titbit for that scrap-book of yours, a scrap-book in which the clergy figure so conspicuously? I am told that about half of those Post-Reformation Englishmen whose lives are recorded in the *Dictionary of National Biography* were the children of parsons; it would seem as if there was something to be said for an education in which religion played a prominent part.

Yours ever,

ARNOLD LUNN.

## XXII.

C/O MISS WELLS,  
 AMBERLEY,  
 SUSSEX.  
 8.8.32.

MY DEAR LUNN,

For once you have surprised me. I had not expected that the suggestion that religion is suspicious of enquiry and hostile to thought would have aroused such a ferocity of denial. To maintain that organised Christianity has been hostile to new knowledge is apparently such "bosh," that you and Mr. Chesterton have to say so three times over to convince yourselves of the fact.

But why this heat? Surely, if the Bible is the word of God, and if the Church is the official repository of divine revelation, the Bible and the Church between them must contain all the revealed truth that at any given moment God thinks it proper for man to know. The suggestion that other truth is impious or unnecessary seems, then, in the light of the Christian hypothesis, inevitable. Nor is there any evidence that the Churches themselves have failed to adopt it. Tertullian, boasting that a Christian mechanic will give a ready answer to problems that have puzzled the wisest philosophers, yourself maintaining that Christian philosophy is "alone consistent and coherent," or the story of Faust with its testimony to the widespread belief in the alliance between men of knowledge and the powers of darkness, all show which way the religious wind blows.

I am in the country away from books of reference,<sup>1</sup> and memory must serve to dispose of your detailed assertions. Chapter and verse afterwards, if you must have them, and there is space. Giordano Bruno, astronomer, Cecco d'Ascoli, Professor at Bologna, astronomer, and Servetus, geographer, were burnt; Galileo narrowly escaped burning and only did so because, when the Church offered him the choice between lying and roasting, he very naturally chose to lie.

<sup>1</sup> With the exception of a book by an American, Andrew D. White, about science and religion, which is very fervid, but may be a little wild.

Let me remind you of the lengths to which the Inquisition went in this matter. All books "which affirm the motion of the earth"<sup>1</sup> were interdicted, and to read such was to risk damnation. The Protestant Church was equally eminent in error. All branches of it, Lutheran, Calvinist and Anglican vied with each other in denouncing the Copernican doctrine as contrary to Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

Buffon as recently as the middle of the eighteenth century was forced by the Church to make this recantation: "I abandon everything in my book respecting the formation of the earth, and generally all which may be contrary to the narrative of Moses." Linnæus, who laid the foundations of modern botany, produced proofs of the sexual system of plants, which led to the interdiction of his writings in the Papal States and other parts of Europe. As for Descartes, although he had personally made his peace with the Church, his teachings were ecclesiastically prohibited and his supporters in the University persecuted for Jansenist leanings.

The Inquisition burnt not only men but books, 6,000 in one single *auto-da-fé* at Salamanca near the end of the fifteenth century. It was one of the results of the Inquisition that, whereas the twelfth century had been one of intellectual dawn and the thirteenth had brought some diffusion of light, the fourteenth was one of complete stagnation. You say that all secular learning (presumably during the Dark and Middle Ages) was "monastic in origin" and due to the Church. It simply isn't true. The learning of the Dark and Middle Ages, such as it was, was almost entirely Classical *in origin*, and monkish merely in preservation. The sort of thing the monks did was to comment unendingly upon Virgil, with a view to showing that he anticipated the coming of Christ—the Messianic Eclogue, you know—and to comment unendingly on Aristotle (known through Latin translations made, please note, from *Arabic*) with a view to squaring his metaphysics with the requirements of Christian dogmatic theology. You say that the revival of medicine in the Middle Ages was due to the Church. Again not true. Medicine during the Dark Ages was kept going by the Mohammedans in the East and together

<sup>1</sup> Andrew D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

with astronomy passed on by them during the Saracen period to the Moors in Spain.

In 1243 the Dominican order forbade medical treatises to be brought into their monasteries, and all participation of ecclesiastics in the science and art of medicine was effectually prevented. This meant, of course, to all intents and purposes the prohibition of the study and practice of surgery, since at that time all avenues of preferment other than that of the Church were closed to educated men. It was through the Arabs and the Moors that algebra, trigonometry and chemistry (an Arab creation) entered Christian Europe.

Remember, moreover, that after the death of John Scotus European culture of practically every kind dwindled almost to zero; it only regained life after the destruction of Constantinople by the Turks in 1452, and the diffusion of the Greek manuscripts. Note, then, two things: it was by a return to the science and thought of a buried paganism that Christian barbarism became a civilisation and Christians acquired culture and came to desire knowledge. Secondly, the preceding centuries, when culture and knowledge sank to their lowest level, were the period of the greatest influence of Christianity and of the unchallenged domination of the Church. Christian influence in Europe as a whole has progressively deteriorated with the spread of knowledge which has taken place since the Renaissance. Here is the conclusion of the matter from Lecky: "During more than three centuries the decadence of theological influence has been one of the most invariable signs and measures of our progress. In medicine, physical science, commercial interest, politics, and even ethics, the reformer has been confronted with theological affirmations which barred his way, which were all defended as of vital importance, and were all in turn compelled to yield before the secularising influence of civilisation."

Your incursion into philosophy was not, I cannot help thinking, very fortunate. We both agree that there is a conflict in Descartes; but you overlook the reason for it—namely, that he was trying to square with an orthodox theology philosophical conclusions and scientific truths which were inconsistent with it. To answer, as you do, that therefore his science and his philosophy were wrong is simply to beg the

question. To charge Huxley with making the mistake of trying to adjust stubborn facts to atheistical prejudices is absurd, for the simple reason that Huxley was not an atheist and said so emphatically and with great deliberation. "I was," he said, "quite sure that I had not" a certain "gnosis" which atheists, theists, pantheists, Christians all possessed, "so I took thought and invented what I conceive to be the appropriate title of 'agnostic.'" I did not criticise contradictions in Hume; I merely quoted his ironical comment to show that the truths of religion must be revealed by faith, since they could not be established by reason. You can't expect me to be impressed by Wallace's account of Natural Selection. It is sixty years out of date; I doubt if any competent scientist now asserts the three distinct stages.

You accuse me of repetition—*e.g.*, I am said to repeat "for the  $n$ th time" my remarks about anæsthetics. I have mentioned anæsthetics twice;  $n$  generally stands for a large number; you are the first in my experience to use it as synonymous with the number 2. I didn't know that you were a mathematical innovator as well as a Christian apologist!

Why is it news to you that the Church has taught that man was a sort of degenerate angel? Have you not heard of the doctrine of the Fall? Was not man perfect before the Fall? Are not angels perfect? Is not an angel, indeed, simply a perfect sort of human being (*e.g.*, after death we go to "join the angels in heaven"), and are not beings who, having fallen, cease to be perfect, a sort of degenerate angel?

On the subject of evolution, I suppose that Popes may say what they please, but they must not be regarded by people like myself as either expressing Christian views or determining Christian belief. I mention this because I have just come upon a letter written by Pope Pius IX in which, denouncing evolution, he remarks that "a system which is repugnant at once to history, to the traditions of all peoples, to exact science, to observed facts, and even to Reason herself, would seem to need no refutation, did not alienation from God and the leaning towards materialism, due to

depravity, eagerly seek a support in all this tissue of fables."

Finally, a point of substance. When I cite some particular folly or falsehood on the part of a priest or a clergyman, you retort with what is in effect a "tu quoque." Clergymen, priests, bishops, and so forth, often, you apparently agree with me, make fools of themselves. But so, you say, do scientists and politicians. Biologists are reactionary; the Duke of Wellington objected to trains; M.P.s made silly objections to the Great Exhibition, and so on. You overlook an essential difference. Scientists and politicians don't speak in God's name; priests and clergymen do. It is not so much the folly of the pronouncements of clergymen as the stupendous claim which they make, and, on your view, are entitled to make—namely, that they are the divinely appointed interpreters of God's will—combined with the folly of their pronouncements that renders them particularly obnoxious to this criticism. When the Duke of Wellington objects to railways, he doesn't say that God objects to them too; when scientists announce a theory, they don't say that it is God's will that it should be believed; when orthodox Darwinists boycott Samuel Butler, they don't say that his views are an offence to God and that he should be punished for heresy. But when a Catholic bishop objects to evolution or short skirts, he says that God objects to them too. The Christian Church, in a word, speaks for God; and so does every priest and parson in it—so, at least, he believes. That is why I fail to be impressed with your "*de fide*" distinction. Churchmen themselves ignore it, and do not hesitate to identify God's will with their personal prejudices and preferences. And it is just because clergymen claim to speak for God that we cannot allow them to make fools of themselves without either denying their claim or supposing that God too makes mistakes.

Here, then, is the essential difference. When the Church lays down the law, it begins with "Thus saith the Lord." When a scientist announces a theory, he begins with "The evidence is on the whole not incompatible with the view that." I hope you see this difference—it is the difference between dogma and hypothesis—and, in seeing it, see too why a mistake

C. E. M. J. TO A. L.

by a scientist or a foolish statement by a politician is in quite a different category from mistakes and follies on the part of those who speak in God's name.

In my next letter I shall bring my case to an end with one of the greatest of these follies.

Yours ever,  
C. E. M. JOAD.

## XXIII.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
KENT.  
August 11, 1932.

MY DEAR JOAD,

You tell me that philosophy is your job, but I am beginning to wonder whether "Greats" includes logic.

"Angels are perfect. Man before the fall was perfect. Therefore man before the fall was an angel." I leave you to discover the flaw in this syllogism. After death we go to "join the angels in heaven." "Is not an angel, then," you ask, "a perfect sort of human being?" By analogy of reasoning we could show that because men join the ladies after port, women are "a perfect sort of masculine being."

Buy a penny Catechism<sup>1</sup> if you wish to discover the difference between Adam and the angels.

I should not have described Huxley as an atheist, and, unlike you, I have no hesitation in conceding my opponent a point when he corrects me on a point of fact.

You accused the Church of burning the first astronomers, physicists, doctors and chemists, and you imply that it was their science which got them into trouble. I ask for names and you produce Servetus and Bruno, neither of whom were burnt for their scientific views, but for their heresies. Servetus denied the Trinity, and it was Bruno's philosophy that was anti-Christian. Bruno was a philosopher with a mild interest in science. To describe him as an astronomer is ridiculous. There is an excellent account of these men in *Historic Trials*, by Sir John Macdonell, which has recently been reprinted by the R.P.A. Symonds has an interesting essay on Bruno in his *Renaissance*. In neither trial did the prosecution base any part of the case on the scientific views of these distinguished heretics.

If Bishop Wilberforce had murdered Huxley he would

<sup>1</sup> Or rather a Twopenny Catechism with a pennyworth of explanations for the uninstructed.



have been hanged for murder and, I suppose, some future Joad would have exploited this fact to prove that the Victorian Church persecuted scientists. Heresy was a capital charge in Bruno's day just as murder is a capital charge in our own times, and neither the Servetus nor Bruno trials can be used as evidence to support your charge that the Church persecuted scientists *qua* scientists, unless you can prove that the Church objected to their scientific views.

You say you are writing away from books, but the sentence which I asked you to justify occurred in your *Saturday Review* article and also, I think, in one of your books. Is it your practice to bring wild charges against the Church and to trust to subsequent research to justify them?

I shall want a lot of persuading that d'Ascoli was burnt *qua* astronomer.

It is amusing that you should have picked on Linnæus; you really have no luck in this controversy. The only persecution that Linnæus suffered was at the hands of his scientific colleague, Rosen. Rosen was alarmed by his success, and persuaded the University of Upsala to prohibit private lectures on medicine such as those which Linnæus was giving. This resulted in a duel.

Galileo, Buffon, Linnæus and d'Ascoli—not much of a bag, is it, for so reckless an expenditure of ammunition? The fact is, of course, as Sir John Macdonald pointed out in that R.P.A. reprint from which I have already quoted, that the Church did not go out of its way to interfere with scientists. "I cannot but think," he writes, "that had the matter arisen a few years earlier or a few years later the condemnation of the Copernican system would not have found its way into the Index. To be fair to its authors, they rarely threw themselves right across the path of physical science. It was doctrine and words which they sought to control."

Throughout your recent letters you have made the common mistake of equating Catholicism with the machinery of Catholic government. A traveller in France may object to the habits of douaniers or to the red tape of the French bureaucracy, but he will not, if he is educated, make the mistake of confusing French bureaucracy with French culture. The machinery of Catholic government does not

differ notably from that of other bureaucracies. No Catholic would defend the government of the Papal State at the beginning of the last century. The same proportion of fools and pedants found their way into the Civil Service of the Papal State as into other Civil Services; the officials who dealt with prohibited books made the same sort of mistakes and the same sort of blunders as our censors made in the Great War. If Linnæus's books were really prohibited in the Papal State, and I dare say they were, such a blunder could be paralleled by many blunders made by our censorship department during the War. You must remember that the Catholic Church is always in a state of war, with heresy as the enemy.

I do not deny that the Church has tried and still tries to prevent the dissemination of heresy, or that a scientist who preaches heresy is still liable to have his books put on the Index, but you are very much mistaken if you suppose that heresy-hunting is a monopoly of the Catholic Church.

Consider, for instance, the case of Vaccination. Bernard Shaw, your great hero, does not believe in vaccination. He refers to "such abominations as the Inquisition and the Vaccination Laws" as if Torquemada was not much worse than the B.M.A. I myself have no strong views on this point; I have been vaccinated since the war and my children have been vaccinated, but one need not have read much anti-vaccination literature to realise that there is a strong *prima facie* case against vaccination. Do you suppose that the *Lancet* would throw open its columns to a leading anti-vaccinationist? No, they would treat his contributions much as the Papal State is alleged to have treated the works of Linnæus.

I need not inflict on you the names of medical men who have suffered severely for their lack of faith in vaccination. Bernard Shaw, whom you admire so much, does not think that there is much to choose between the tyranny of the Church and the tyranny of organised science; in fact, I am inclined to suspect that he would prefer the tyranny of the Church.

We have heard a great deal in this correspondence about the attitude of parsons to anæsthetics, and it is time that

some reference was made to Dr. Axham. Sir Herbert Barker, as you know, is regarded as a quack in medical circles. His work as a bone-setter has been boycotted by the medical profession in spite of the fact that he has received the honour of knighthood from the King. Bone-setting is a painful business, and medical circles refused him the services of an anæsthetist. Dr. Axham courageously defied the medical boycott and acted as his anæsthetist, and, as a result, was struck off the register "for infamous conduct in a professional sense." Even the Inquisition did not go so far as to describe the alleviation of pain as "infamous conduct." You may remember the tremendous efforts—I forget whether they were successful—to reinstate Dr. Axham shortly before his death.

Here is another illustration of scientific persecution—psychical research.

I am not a spiritualist, but I find it difficult to resist the evidence that certain things occur at séances which, if proved to be true, would revolutionise orthodox science. There are few greater scandals in the history of science than the attitude of organised science to men who have shown the least interest in this form of scientific research. Sir Oliver Lodge told me that it was only a few years ago, after the War, that *Nature* first published an article describing the odd phenomena by a believer in their reality.

If the Church's claims are true, it is the duty of the Church to suppress heresy, for the Church claims to be the divinely appointed guardian of supernatural truth. Scientists make no such claim. A scientist who indulges in heresy-hunting is acting against the light, and yet scientists have suffered far more from scientific than from clerical persecution.

Your attempt to defend the sillier utterances of scientists on the ground that whereas a clergyman claims to speak for God, when a scientist announces a theory he begins with the words "The evidence is on the whole not incompatible with the view that" might convince a reader who had never met a real scientist and who was quite unfamiliar with scientific literature. You are describing the ideal scientist whom none of us have met. In real life the scientist is as dogmatic and as intolerant as other people, and often more so, as I tried to show

in my book *The Flight from Reason*. The scientific equivalent of "*Thus saith the Lord*" is "*Science teaches*." Historians are fond of the phrase "History teaches," and moderns, such as yourself, are fond of identifying progress with their own particular views.

Many modern parsons might well be more dogmatic than they are. I dislike the tendency to substitute "*Thus thinks Eddington*" for "*Thus saith the Lord*." As Father Knox says:

"Where suave politeness, temp'ring bigot Zeal,  
Corrected *I believe* to *One does feel*."

So far as Roman Catholics are concerned, it is simply untrue to accuse Roman priests of representing their private views as the teaching of the Church. A priest is far too thoroughly drilled during his years of training in the distinction between private judgment and defined doctrine. Many priests, for instance, are fervent teetotallers. Cardinal Manning was an ardent apostle of temperance, but neither Manning nor any other priest ever urged total abstinence in the name of the Church.

Before we leave the subject of persecution, let me remind you that heresy-hunting, so far from being a monopoly of churchmen, is a very normal human instinct. A heretic is resented not only because he attacks established belief, but because by so doing he implies that he is cleverer than his fellows. Moreover, the heretic is often a very aggressive person. Consider, for instance, that great scientific pioneer Roger Bacon, the inventor of the experimental method for which that old humbug Lord Bacon attempted to steal the credit.

Roger Bacon was by no means an amiable man. He attacked the great leaders of Catholic thought, whom he accused of "puerile vanity and ineffable falsity." Even his own Order, the Franciscan, came in for its share of abuse. "*Nullum ordinem excludo*," he exclaimed in a fine burst of impartial invective. And of course his fellow-Franciscans did not like him and made things as uncomfortable for him as they could, and they would have made things much more uncomfortable had he not been protected by an enlightened Pope.

I may perhaps be forgiven for mentioning the fact that in the course of my controversy with Father Knox I went into

the whole question of the relations between the Church and Science very carefully. As I dislike making accusations which I cannot substantiate, a little mental idiosyncrasy which you may find it difficult to understand, I contented myself with working Galileo for all he was worth, for I realised that he was practically the only case of a genuine scientific martyr of clerical persecution. I wonder that Mr. Bernard Shaw has not succeeded in impressing on you the fact—I quote his own words—that “society is founded on intolerance.” “There are glaring cases,” he adds, “of the abuse of intolerance; but they are quite as characteristic of our own age as of the Middle Ages.” How Mr. Shaw would rock with laughter at your picture of the scientist announcing a theory with the words, “The evidence is on the whole not incompatible with the view that . . .”

The best excuse for your strange remarks about mediæval medicine is the fact that you seem to have relied solely on that unscholarly American book by Dr. White. He is, I suppose, your authority for the Dominican veto on medical study, which was certainly not inspired by any antipathy for medical study as such, but was due to the simple fact that the cure of souls was considered too exacting to leave leisure for medicine. The Dominicans were an order of preachers founded to combat heresy, to deal with the diseases of the soul rather than with the diseases of the body. Their special function was to cope with mediæval loads, a full-time job which was, I expect, the explanation of this veto. That this attitude to medicine was not universal, even among the orders, is proved by the fact that the Franciscans who settled in town slums practised medicine. Even if all priests had been forbidden to practise medicine what would this prove? That the Church preferred laymen to look after the body, leaving the care of the soul to the priest. *Sutor ne supra crepidam*. If, instead of relying on Dr. White, you had consulted the histories of medicine or surgery written by scholars, you would have saved yourself some obvious blunders. You should, for instance, read Gurlt's *History of Surgery*. This great German historian of surgery would certainly dispute your theory (*i.e.* White's theory) that mediæval medicine owed everything to the Arabs. Writing of the great surgeon

Roger, he says: "Though Arabian writings on surgery had been brought over to Italy by Constantine Africanus a hundred years before Roger's time, these exercised no influence over Italian surgery in the next century, and there is not a trace of the influence of the Arabs to be found in Roger's work." Mediæval medicine appears as ridiculous to us as our medicine will doubtless appear to our descendants. It is, as Professor Richet somewhere remarks, rather disheartening "that the therapeutics of any generation always seem absurd to the second succeeding generation." On the other hand, those best qualified to know have the liveliest respect for mediæval surgery.

Professor Clifford Allbutt, Regius Professor of Physics at the University of Cambridge, speaks in terms of the highest praise of William of Salicet. "Like Lanfranc and the other great surgeons of the Italian tradition," he writes, "William had the advantage of the *liberal university education of Italy*." Moreover, William is praised for substituting correct methods for the incorrect methods of your friends the Arabs. "He substituted the knife for the Arabist abuse of the cautery, he investigated the causes of the failure of healing by first intention, he sutured divided nerves, he forwarded the diagnosis of suppurative diseases of the hip, and he referred chancre and phagedena to their proper causes."

Of Guy de Chauliac, who has been described as the Father of Modern Surgery, and who died about the middle of the fourteenth century, when, according to you, culture had sunk to its lowest ebb, Portal has written: "It may be averred that Guy de Chauliac said nearly everything that modern surgeons say and that his work is of infinite price, but unfortunately too little pondered."

There is an excellent essay on mediæval scientific universities in *Education; How Old the New*, by J. J. Walsh, M.D. You had better read it, if you feel an urge to write any further on the subject of mediæval medicine. You might also with advantage read Joan Evans's book, *Mediæval France*, and in particular references to the progress of medicine at Montdidier University. *Education; How Old the New* contains many facts which will both surprise and pain so determined an anti-mediævalist as yourself.

In your attack on the Church's attitude to education you have shifted your ground. You begin by informing me that the Church regarded secular knowledge as "either impious or unnecessary." I requested you with my usual urbanity not to talk bosh, and you reply triumphantly that the Church, so far from regarding secular knowledge as either impious or unnecessary, imposed upon the young a form of learning "almost entirely classical in origin," and welcomed with enthusiasm Arabic discoveries in Algebra and Trigonometry. The Church, in fact, in her enthusiasm for secular learning, took what was good even from infidels and heretics. You do your best to transform this belated admission into an attack on the Church by suggesting that the monks were only interested in Virgil because he prophesied the death of Christ, and in Aristotle because his logic was the basis of scholastic theology (incidentally Aristotle's logic must have had more effect on their writings than on yours). The mediæval classical education was, however, much wider than you suppose. "Just as the Psalter," writes Professor J. W. Adamson, "was the boy's first book, so Ovid was his first 'classic.' Virgil was looked upon as half a Christian, Cicero was the model orator and an authority on philosophy and religion, Seneca was read as moralist and as man of science, Quintilian was still the authority on rhetorical education."<sup>1</sup>

When I said that secular learning in the Middle Ages was monastic in origin I meant, of course, that all schools and universities were founded by the Church. Space will not permit of a detailed description of the mediæval curriculum, and so I will content myself with the verdict of Thomas Henry Huxley, who could hardly be accused of an ultramontane bias. "The scholars of the mediæval universities seem to have studied grammar, logic and rhetoric; arithmetic and geometry; astronomy, theology and music. Thus, their work, however imperfect and faulty, judged by modern lights, it may have been, brought them face to face with all the leading aspects of the many-sided mind of man. For these studies did really contain, at any rate in embryo, sometimes it may be in caricature, what we now call philosophy, mathematical and physical science and art. *And I doubt if the curriculum of any*

<sup>1</sup> *Legacy of the Middle Ages*, p. 269.

*modern university shows so clear and generous a comprehension of what is meant by culture, as this old Trivium and Quadrivium does."*

Make the most of "sometimes in caricature," a phrase which may perhaps help you to forget the words which I have italicised.

The thesis that the Church did nothing for social or scientific advance would find no support among scholars. Dr. Powicke, Regius Professor of History at Oxford, tells us that "by maintaining as a practical guide in life the conception of an ordered universe, in which there is a fundamental harmony between moral and physical law, the Church turned the faces of the European peoples in the only direction along which social and scientific advance was possible."<sup>1</sup> Still more remarkable is the tribute of that great scientist, Professor A. N. Whitehead, F.R.S., who tells us that the Middle Ages "formed one long training of the intellect of Europe in the sense of order." He continues: "The greatest contribution of mediævalism to the formation of the scientific movement was the 'inexpugnable belief that every detailed occurrence can be correlated with its antecedents in a perfectly definite manner, exemplifying general principles.' . . . The faith in the possibility of Science generated antecedently to the development of modern scientific theory is an unconscious derivative from mediæval theology." And he adds that scholasticism "inculcated one valuable habit, the priceless habit of looking for an exact point and sticking to the point when found."

Before I discuss the most amazing of many amazing remarks which you have made in the course of this correspondence, let me remind you that the diffusion of Greek manuscripts which followed the sack of Constantinople merely confirms my thesis that the Church had a high regard for secular classical culture. These manuscripts were conserved in the most theocratic of all states, Byzantium, a state which, as Rambaud remarked in his *Byzantine Studies*, was "a peine laïque . . . Entre l'église et l'état il n'y a pas lutte, mais harmonie, presque confusion."

You might with advantage read Robert Byron's magnificent book, *The Byzantine Achievement*, a book which you will

<sup>1</sup> *Legacy of the Middle Ages*, p. 56.



read with the greater pleasure because his dislike of the Roman Church is as fierce as, but far more instructed than, your own. Incidentally your theory that the Renaissance began with the fall of Constantinople is curiously old-fashioned. Petrarch, who died nearly eighty years before that date, was the first to foresee the immense importance of the study of Greek, and he inspired Boccaccio to master that tongue. The revival of Platonic studies in the West was largely due to Plethon, who died before the fall of Constantinople. Of course Petrarch and Plethon were both affected by Byzantine influence, but what does this prove? Merely that whereas the Roman Catholic Church occupied itself chiefly, as we should expect, with the reverent preservation of Latin culture, so the Greek Church devoted itself to the preservation of Greek culture.

Your dreadful remark that "European culture of practically every kind languished between the death of Scotus (1309) and 1452" is the only remark in your letters which has really succeeded in shocking me, perhaps because I have been at work on a book on Venice, which I love this side of idolatry. When I think of that synthesis of visible and cultural beauty which reached its Venetian climax between the dates which you mention, I do not know whether to laugh or to weep when you tell me that the fourteenth century "was one of complete stagnation." What is the use of firing off a string of names, Petrarch and Chaucer among writers, Fra Angelico, Van Eyck and Memling among painters, or of bludgeoning you with a list of the great cathedrals of this period? How can I hope to make any impression on a man who is capable of such perverse folly? The reader will not expect me to refute such views, but he may be interested in the reasons which have led a man of your education to make such statements. I think the true explanation is that you are the product of a particularly narrow type of Protestantism. Your spiritual pedigree goes back in the direct line to Mrs. Sherwood, whose *Outline of Profane History*, published in 1819, was so widely used for genteel female education.

"From about the sixth to the sixteenth century, Europe was in a state of the utmost ignorance and barbarity. These are called the dark ages. The savage nations who had come

pouring like mighty torrents over the more southern countries, introduced everywhere new laws, new manners, new dresses, new names, and new forms of government. Science, taste, and learning were unknown in those ages; and so great was the prevailing ignorance that persons of the highest rank could neither read nor write."

Lecky is only a better informed Mrs. Sherwood. His books are inspired by that hatred of Catholicism which is a distinguishing characteristic of Lecky's vigorous Irish Protestant stock. You dismiss Wallace as fifty years out-of-date, and have not yet discovered that Lecky is equally old-fashioned. If you doubt this, ask any competent mediæval scholar at Oxford or Cambridge, and he will tell you that the attitude of scholars to the Middle Ages has been revolutionised since Lecky's day. Read Christopher Dawson's *The Making of Europe*, a book which has been received with a chorus of enthusiastic praise in the world of scholarship. Even you will then realise the stupidity of saying that Christian barbarism was civilised by buried paganism; even you may perhaps learn that it was Christianity which named, educated and civilised the barbarians who had swept southward into Italy.

When I read your attack on that great culture of Catholic Europe, I seem to hear the new barbarians knocking at the gate, the new barbarians who herald the return of an age perhaps darker and more miserable than the dark ages.

Mr. Wells, with whom I was lunching the other day, told me that you were groaning because I had forced you to "mug up" so many facts. I can find little evidence to justify these groans in your letters; your acquaintance with the Middle Ages appears to be confined to two secondary authorities, Lecky and White. There is an old Latin proverb which asserts that those who know least are readiest to pronounce judgment, *qui ad pauca respiciunt facilliter pronuntiant*.

Your patron saint, Mr. Bernard Shaw, has some hard words to say of "those who confuse the Middle Ages with the Dark Ages," and of those who, like yourself, "are quite convinced that the world has progressed both morally and mechanically since St. Joan's time." I am afraid he would class you with Mark Twain, the "Mississippi pilot who saw the lovely churches of the Middle Ages without a throb of emotion."

A. L. TO C. E. M. J.

It was Whistler, I think, who explained to a Philistine who was making silly comments at an exhibition of his pictures, "You seem to forget that it is not the pictures but the spectators who are on trial." The same could be said with far greater truth of the Middle Ages. Nothing you can say will affect the verdict of scholarship on that great period; it is you who will be judged by your reactions to the glory of mediæval culture.

Yours ever,  
ARNOLD LUNN.

## XXIV.

C/o MISS WELLS,  
AMBERLEY,  
SUSSEX.  
August 15.

MY DEAR LUNN,

I.—I am still in the country away from books, and I will therefore defer my reply to your last letter until I have your comments on this one.

The Church's attitude to sex seems to be determined by two considerations, at both of which I have already glanced: dislike of the body and contempt of the world. The body is the source of sin, the occasion of temptation, the enemy of the soul; therefore its pleasures are suspect and enjoyed to the danger of the soul. This world is a place of discipline and chastening, a vale of tears, an abode of sin; it is emphatically not a place in which to enjoy oneself; therefore its pleasures are at best evanescent illusions, at worst corrupting allurements. The pleasures of sex are pleasures both of the body and of the world; hence the Christian dislike, a dislike which, in varying forms, from direct prohibition to grudging acquiescence coupled with a pained surprise that the Almighty did not devise a less discreditable way of continuing the species, has persisted all through the ages.

The early Christian fathers, expecting the immediate end of the world, saw no reason to take steps to ensure the continuance of the race. The Church's hostility to the pleasures of the senses was, therefore, allowed to rage unchecked, and sexual intercourse was denounced as both wicked and unnecessary. As time passed, it was found that the world showed no signs of coming to an end, an inconsiderateness on the part of nature which led to the necessity for a change of attitude. The Church met the situation with a complete *volte face*. It had previously stigmatised the natural passions as so wicked that no Christian should be permitted to indulge them; it now pronounced them to be so sacred that no Christian should be permitted to indulge them without

the sanction of the Church. The sanction of the Church was given in marriage, a device whereby the Fathers sought to control and to regulate the workings of a passion they were unable to ignore. Since then the Church has claimed both the ability and the right to sanctify sex, and has looked with disfavour upon marriages consummated by the State as an infringement of her monopoly. By the device of marriage sex is canalised into a particular channel and there licensed by the authority of the Church.

Having claimed both the ability and the right to sanctify sex, the Church naturally looks askance at unlicensed relations as an infringement of her monopoly. The fact that sexual relations in unauthorised directions are called "sin" and an "offence against God" should not, therefore, blind us to the real nature of the Church's objection, which is that of the Trade Union objecting to one of its members taking a job at an unauthorised rate of wages. All this, perhaps, is understandable enough; nobody likes to see his monopoly infringed or his authority set at naught. What is, perhaps, a little surprising is that the Church should so dislike revoking one license and issuing another, that it should object so strongly to divorce. If you have the issue of all the licenses in your hands, the more you issue the better for you. Or so one would have thought. The explanation is, I suppose, that dislike of sexual pleasure overrides mere professional considerations. Divorce, as you know, is permitted by the Anglican Church, but only when one of the parties has committed adultery. If both of them have done so, it is normally refused. This means, I take it, that adultery is a "sin," and that divorce is regarded by the Church as a punishment for "sin." But, if both parties want it, it cannot be a punishment to either, with the result that the English law, inspired as usual in such matters by the Church, refuses divorce on the ground that there has been collusion. The Church in fact will only look kindly, or perhaps I had better say look the other way, where divorce is concerned, if the granting of it hurts somebody. If it is a gratification to both parties, especially if it opens up new possibilities of permitted sexual pleasure to both, it is fiercely denounced.

As with divorce, so with birth control. It is maintained

## CHURCHES' OBJECTIONS TO BIRTH CONTROL

by the Church that birth control is displeasing to the Almighty, who invented sexual intercourse for the production not of pleasure but of children. Whether the Almighty would agree with the views put forward by those who speak in His name is not known. Until, therefore, we can obtain a direct expression of His opinion in the matter it is more prudent to assume that His attitude is non-committal than to supply the place of knowledge by converting our guesses into dogmas.

However, hesitation in interpreting God's will has never been a characteristic of the Church, and celibate priests do not shrink from convicting married women of mortal sin if they seek to avoid the bearing of children whom they do not want and cannot maintain.

For the Churches' opposition to birth control there appear to be two main reasons. In the first place, it takes from the Churches power, the power to shame and to humiliate. Action otherwise than in accordance with the beliefs about sex authorised by the Churches is defined by them as "sin." Owing to the unfortunate propensity of sexual pleasure to result in children, the Churches have in the past usually been able to detect those who have "sinned," and to humiliate them with appalling punishments. Nathaniel Hawthorne's story, *The Scarlet Letter*, affords a good illustration of the ferocity of religious people in these matters. Owing to the popularisation of contraceptives, however, detection is no longer easy. It is now possible for women to have sexual intercourse with persons other than their husbands without visible effects, and that canalisation of the sex instinct along one official channel, which is the main achievement of the Christian invention of marriage, is no longer practicable. Hence the Churches oppose birth control with violent hostility.

In the second place, birth control increases the possibilities of human pleasure. In enabling the pleasures of sex to be tasted without its penalties, it has removed the most formidable deterrent not only to regular but to irregular sexual intercourse. In most of us there lurks the old Puritan attitude which insists that pleasure cannot, or should not, be had without paying for it. This, at least, is true of those

pleasures we do not share. It is this sentiment which is outraged by the immunity from the consequences of sexual pleasure which birth control confers.

"We cannot altogether prevent sexual pleasure," say the Churches in effect; "the race after all must go on, and it is an undoubted fact that the arrangements for perpetuating it are regrettably diverting. As we have already said, we cannot quite understand the methods God has chosen to adopt in this matter. But pain follows, at least it does for the woman. And rightly; for woman, it is well known, is an instrument of the devil, chosen and apt to beguile men from the path of virtue. And even the man will have to stint himself of his pleasures to bear the expenses of another child. So, one way and another, things are not so bad; or were not, until these contraceptives appeared on the scene. But birth control! Pleasure without pain, indulgence without expense or, apparently, remorse. It's horrible!" The attitude, you see, is like that of Macaulay's Puritan who objected to bear baiting, not so much because of the pain it gave to the bear as because of the pleasure it gave to the spectators.

That the two reasons I have given, although not the only factors in the contemporary opposition to birth control, are those which chiefly determine the attitude of the Churches you can judge for yourself by reading the pronouncements of the average clergyman. The average clergyman is shocked and outraged by the prospect of shameless, harmless and unlimited pleasure which birth control offers to the young, and, if he can stop it, he will. And from his point of view he is quite right. Science has dealt no subtler blow to the authority of the Churches and the system of morals upon which it takes its stand than by facilitating the introduction and popularisation of reasonably safe contraceptives.

Now let us see what this clerical opposition means. The first thing to notice is the gross unfairness of the class discrimination in which it is prepared to acquiesce. As in the case of Sunday observance, the attitude of the Church, which leaves the well-to-do unaffected, operates against the pleasures of the poor. Yet Christianity is *par excellence* the religion of the poor—or should be. For consider—if a middle-class woman wishes for any reason to cease for a space from having

babies, she goes to her doctor and he tells her how to do it. But a working-class woman has no "doctor" in this sense; she cannot afford one. The State has, accordingly, provided her with an official substitute for a private doctor in the Maternity and Child Welfare Centres which have been established in most large towns. It is at these Centres that the working woman obtains assistance and advice in regard to the welfare of her child. But suppose that she wishes for any reason—because, let us say, she has seven children already and two rooms to house them in—to avoid having a child, can the Centre give her the information which the private doctor gives to the middle-class woman? In the majority of cases—there is now something like local option in these matters—it cannot. Why not? Because the influence of the clergy opposes the necessary authorisation. What, then, does she do? She either has a baby which she has neither the means nor the time to care for, or else she contrives an abortion, often with disastrous results to herself.

In seeking to place this embargo upon the information which would enable women to forgo unlimited child-bearing, the Church condemns thousands of human beings to virtual slavery. A slave is a person without freewill; he puts up with things, not because he chooses but because he must. It is precisely to this kind of slavery that women are condemned by the perpetual confinements they know not how to avoid. To be always ill, and as a consequence always irritable; to wage a constant and unsuccessful fight against weakness and nausea; to struggle in the midst of that weakness against the effects of overcrowding, of underfeeding, and of perpetual noise and racket; to strive, with five small children at your skirts and another on the way, for that minimum of tidiness and cleanliness without which no woman can respect either herself or her home—to do all this from morning to night knowing that your efforts are doomed to failure, and that, in spite of all you can do, there is no prospect of improvement or relief until your children are grown up and you yourself an old woman, *that* is slavery. It means a life which is destitute of beauty, of spaciousness and of leisure: a life to which a Church that stands for the doctrines of Christ should be ashamed to condemn its



members, yet does condemn them by its opposition to birth control.

Upon the other way out, the way of abortion, I do not propose to dilate. It is a way which thousands of women take, and they take it to the danger of health and often of life, because of the difficulty of obtaining information in regard to birth control technique and the necessary birth control appliances. For this difficulty the influence of the Church is largely responsible. From trapped and frightened women the Church one way and another takes an appalling toll of human suffering: it first makes it difficult for them to procure contraceptives; it then encourages the law to persecute them with ferocious penalties, if they seek an abortion, and, for those who still believe in it, adds to the terrors of the law in this world the threat of eternal damnation in the next. And all this because they do not wish to bring into the world children for whom they can neither care nor provide.

But, you may say, I am charging the Church with the errors and omissions of the law. The Church, you may say, does not really wish these results, or the results do not in fact follow from the attitude which the Church adopts. And I suggest to you that you should say one or other of these things, because I cannot conceive that you would really wish to take credit to the Church for the effects I have described; and, if you do not, then there seem to be only the two alternatives of denying that they are effects, or denying that the Church wills them. Faced with this suggestion which I have put into your mouth, because I have often heard it from others, I go to the fountain head, and take a recent pronouncement of the Pope.

In the spring of 1931 the Pope issued an Encyclical declaring the will of God, which is also, please notice, that of the Catholic Church, with regard to the whole question of the relations between the sexes. The Encyclical consists of a number of assertions of which the three most important are the following:

(1) Birth control is wicked; it is also widely practised; not, however, by the Catholic Church, which is said to be "standing erect in the middle of the moral ruin which sur-

rounds her, in order that she may preserve the chastity of the nuptial union from being defiled by this foul stain."

(2) Marriage is a sacrament and divorce, therefore, is sinful.

(3) Wives should obey their husbands: "The wife should be subject to the husband, but this subjection . . . does not bid her to obey her husband's every request, when such a request is not in keeping with reason."

It is a pity to spoil these very remarkable assertions with comments. Two, however, must be offered. First, these statements are perfectly clear and unequivocal; they represent the considered will of the Church. Secondly, if this is, indeed, what the Church wills, are the effects of what it wills such as I have suggested? I think it is clear that they are.

(1) If birth control is wicked, it is clear that wives do wrong in taking steps to prevent themselves from having children, whenever their husbands wish to have intercourse with them.

(2) If divorce is a sin, married women must not seek to cease to be the wives of drunkards, criminals and lunatics.

(3) Since wives must obey the reasonable requests of their husbands, and since sexual intercourse between husband and wife is assuredly reasonable, the Church having laid it down that it was for this purpose that marriage was instituted, and since, further, they must not practise the methods of birth control, it follows that it is the duty of a wife to bear children to a lunatic, catch syphilis from a rake, and allow herself to be violated by a drunkard, so long as he happens to be her husband.

In the light of the increase in human misery and the lowering of the standard of human health which action in accordance with the Pope's Encyclical would involve, it is impossible to deny oneself the pleasure of asking him how he knows that God wants these things. If I believed in any such Being, I should be very chary of allowing it to be supposed that he possessed the character and intentions which the Pope's Encyclical attributes to him.

Yet the Pope has no such hesitation. He is quite certain that he knows what God means, and also, significantly, that what God means is precisely the same as what the Pope

means. He speaks, he says, for "the Catholic Church, *to whom God has entrusted the defence of the integrity and purity of morals*" (my italics). Moreover, what God means is the same apparently as what nature intends. To interfere with the intentions of nature is, therefore, to thwart the intentions of God. The Church, says the Pope, "raises her voice in token of her Divine ambassadorship and through our mouth proclaims anew: Any use whatever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an offence against the law of God *and the law of nature*" (my italics), "and those who indulge in such acts are branded with the guilt of a grave sin. Any circumstances, such as health or economic conditions, do not constitute an excuse for the frustration of the marriage act."

Now I notice from a recent photograph of the Pope that he has no hair on his chin or upper lip. I propose to assume that he grows it but has shaved it off. Yet nature certainly intended him to have it there, and God, therefore, must be presumed to have intended the same. I further suppose, although I do not know, that the Pope cuts his toe and finger nails. In so doing he again undeniably frustrates nature's intention in the matter of his appearance.

Since the Pope is a pious man, we can only suppose that he knows that God, who objects to interference with the laws of nature in the matter of birth control, has made a special exception in the matter of the Pope's hair and nails. For God, if His wishes are to be identified with nature, clearly intended the Pope to have one sort of appearance; yet the Pope has deliberately chosen to present another. I can only infer that the Pope knows that God does not mind his thwarting His intentions in the matter of hair production, but that He does mind other people doing so in the matter of child production.

But I have forgotten one important difference: To do the Pope justice, I doubt whether he gets much pleasure from shaving and toe-nail cutting; but the processes incidental to the production of children are pleasurable—distinctly so!

Therefore, that I may stop trifling with the Pope and return to business, is it really beside the mark to suggest, as

I did above, that what he really objects to is sexual pleasure? He can bear so little that human beings should enjoy themselves sexually, that he threatens them with eternal torment if they do. That he *really* thinks that God will be offended if people have intercourse without children, I find it difficult to believe: that he really thinks that God desires women to submit their minds and give their bodies to lunatics and drunkards, merely because they once went through the ceremony of marriage with them before they were either, I find still more difficult. It is, of course, possible that I under-rate the power of superstition, and that the Pope really does think God desires these things, although how, if he does so, he can claim reverence and worship for such a God passes my credence altogether.

And so I come back to my original suggestion, that the root of the matter is the Christian objection to the pleasures of the body. "The flesh is wicked and ought to be mortified, not gratified. We do not like people to indulge their sexual desires." So the Churches, and proceed to rationalise their objection on the usual lines by equating what they dislike with sin.

And I am confirmed in this view by the general attitude which clergymen adopt towards the body. This attitude is one of grudging acquiescence in its existence, provided it be kept properly covered up, but of indignant horror if any large part of it is allowed to appear in the open.

This attitude is particularly noticeable at a time when there is apparent in the lay public a more rational view of the body, a recognition of its need for air and light, for exercise in air and light, and for frequent immersion in water. On all hands clergymen are to be found obstructing this general movement of the times, proclaiming in a sort of frenzy of decorum that the body must be covered. Thus the Church gains a reputation for decency by the simple process of stigmatising large areas of the body as indecent. It also holds that God made the body.

I don't know whether you will be disposed to deny that this is in fact the Church's attitude, or refuse to credit my assertion of the hundred and one examples of it that come monthly and almost daily to my personal notice: my failure

to obtain a bath in an open-air swimming bath at Nottingham, on the ground that the clergy on the Council did not like bathing on Sunday; my inability to bathe in company with my daughter at Hampstead because clerical influences on the L.C.C. are said to be opposed to mixed bathing; the notice which I have read in Italian churches prohibiting the entry of women with short sleeves on the ground that God or the Pope—I cannot remember which—does not like the sight of women's arms.

But, as you may feel indisposed to attach much weight to these purely personal experiences, you must, I am afraid, be patient while I favour you with a few samples of the contemporary clerical attitude to the body taken from the public Press. I have selected instances which have appeared during the last month, and to make my survey as impartial as the paucity of the examples permit, I have taken each from a different country, two from Protestant, and one from a Catholic country. I must again warn you not to let your sense of humour desert you.

#### OBJECTIONS TO LEGS AND ARMS (*News Chronicle*):

The clothing of a ballet of 80 young women in a dramatised version of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, which is being presented at Southampton Wesleyan Central Hall, has given rise to some controversy.

The legs and arms of the dancers are bare, but are stained a light brown colour, *and the view has been expressed that this is not in keeping with the fact that the hall is normally used for religious services.* (My italics.)

#### OBJECTION TO KNEES (*Evening News*):

*Bishop Bans Shorts for Footballers. So they Played in Long Trousers.*

BREST,  
Tuesday.

Mgr. Du Parcq, the Bishop of Quimper and Leon, after having severely condemned dancing, dancers, and jazz bands, has now forbidden the football team of St. Gervais to play football in shorts, which he describes as indecent.

The team played in long trousers on Sunday.

## CLERGYMEN ON THE BODY

An abbé, who subscribes to the bishop's dictum, has even asked the wives of footballers who play in shorts to give their husbands burned food until they stop doing so.—*Exchange*.

Finally (*News Chronicle*):

### OBJECTIONS TO DISPLAY OF CONTOURS OF FEMALE BODY BY USE OF TROUSERS.

BELFAST,  
Thursday.

*From Our Own Correspondent.*

Girl hikers who wear shorts and bathing beauties who wear beach pyjamas are up in arms in Ulster following criticism of their clothes by the Rev. H. O'Connor, Rector of Dundrum, County Down.

Mr. O'Connor warns young women who wear male attire on their holidays at seaside resorts that they will incur "divine displeasure on themselves and on the nation by their thoughtless action."

He quotes Deuteronomy, chapter 22, verse 5:

"The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God."

This last specimen, I submit, is very choice; the suggestion that God will punish the nation (Northern Ireland, I wonder, or the island as a whole, or Great Britain; it is not clear) because girls wear shorts at the seaside is a touch of genius.

Now all this, you will say, is very silly; I agree with you. "Why will you quote silly parsons?" you complain. But I won't have it pooh-poohed for the following reasons:

(1) The quotations are remarkable only in being funnier than usual. The attitude they represent is common enough; it is, indeed, typical of that of dozens of clergymen I have met personally or read. Moreover, it is backed, as we have seen, by the authority of the Pope.

(2) The attitude springs from the same dislike of the body, especially of the flesh, as that which determines the Christian attitude to divorce and birth control.

(3) It illustrates the point already made, that clergymen in this, as in other matters, claim to voice the will of God; they purport to communicate revealed truth. Hence, they cannot afford to be silly without implicating God.

(4) It has considerable influence. Admittedly the influence is largely confined to the old and the ignorant; but the old are to be found in authority on municipal bodies and so forth, where it causes them to make silly restrictive regulations, and the ignorant multiply at the expense of the educated. We owe the spate of feeble-minded children and the large increase in the Catholic population of these islands in large part to the attitude of the Catholic Church to birth control.

(5) It is inimical to public health and happiness and obstructs the movement of the times towards a more rational attitude to the body and a saner attitude to sexual relations. From this point of view it definitely impedes the progress of the race.

#### SUMMARY

II.—I have now come to the end of the last part of my case, and I may as well summarise what I have tried and what I have not tried to do. I have tried to argue, first, that the Christian view of the universe is untrue. It is involved in contradictions, it makes assertions for which there is no evidence, and it is repugnant to reason. It is not merely that it leaves certain things—pain and evil, for instance—unexplained (as you yourself pointed out, it is silly to suppose that our minds can grasp all the truth or understand all the meaning of the universe), but it adopts a view of things such that, if it be true, they must necessarily be inexplicable. If the universe is in its fundamental nature such as Christians assert, and human life is designed by a being such as they aver, then pain and evil simply could not be. In other words, the facts contradict the whole Christian hypothesis.

Secondly, I have argued that, the world being such as it is, the Christian view that it was created by an omnipotent deity is morally unacceptable. If the first hypothesis is repugnant to the head, the second is intolerable to the heart. Not only is the Christian view of God not true; we should thank God

## WHAT JOAD HAS NOT MAINTAINED

that it is not. I also tried to show how, nevertheless, the belief in the Christian God arose, why it has flourished, and the many and palpable uses it has served.

Thirdly, I argued that the organised religion of Christianity which has promoted these beliefs has historically been the cause of a great volume of human pain and misery. This pain and this misery were avoidable in the sense that, if there had not been Christianity, they would not have occurred.

Finally, I have tried to show that Christianity has obstructed the mental development of our species, hampered its discoveries and impeded its progress. This is true not only of the past but also of the present. As a consequence the world would be, in my view, a brighter and a happier place, mankind a less quarrelsome and more enlightened species, at once gayer and saner, less given to hatred and intolerance, less preyed upon by superstitious fears, less prone to irrational beliefs, if it were not for the power past and present of Christianity as exercised by the organised Churches.

More important, perhaps, than this summary of what I have argued is what I have not. I have nowhere argued, because I do not believe, that the universe does not contain elements or factors of absolute value, of which goodness, truth and beauty are at once the most eminent and the most evident.

I have nowhere argued that these values may not be aspects of a unity which may transcend them; or that this unity may not be conceived in the likeness of personality, may not, in fact, be analogous to what we call a person. I stress this because it is the ground of that admission of mine, to which you have called attention, of the possibility, even the probability, of the existence of deity. I have nowhere argued that there may not be intuitive knowledge, which is, I think, probably what you mean by "revelation," of these things. But a deity so conceived has little relation to the Christian God. He is not creative, He is not responsible for this world, and He does not participate in its government. He may be dimly apprehended—the apprehension of Him is, I hold, the most probable explanation of some forms of mystical experience—but He is unaware of and unresponsive to the



minds that know Him, while, if the movement of evolution is towards a fuller and clearer knowledge of the world of value and of God as the unity of that world, He is unaffected by this movement. Aloof, detached, ineffable and indescribable, He is like Aristotle's Prime Mover, an object of desire which, drawing the world towards Him, is no more interested in its yearning than is the magnet in the steel filings it attracts.

That there is such a God I do not wish to assert; in the existing state of our knowledge, at our present stage of the evolutionary process, it seems to me to be absurd to venture upon definite assertions about the ultimate nature and meaning of the universe. The hypothesis seems, however, to me to be a not improbable one, and to afford as good an explanation of the phenomena of mystical experience as any other with which I am acquainted.

I have nowhere argued that Jesus Christ was not a very tremendous person indeed. I think that he was, although from what I have just written it will follow that I cannot regard him as divine. The quality of divinity is, indeed, for me more like that of a piece of music or a picture than like that of a mind or a personality. I think Christ's ethical code one of the most valuable that has been offered to mankind, and that it is to our persistent refusal to practise it that many of the troubles of the world are due. It must be remembered that no Government has ever yet taken Christ seriously to the extent of conducting its affairs for five minutes on the assumption that any of the things he said are true. For this I hold that the organised Churches are partly to blame, the religion which they teach having very little relation to the teaching of Christ, the religion which they practise still less. The M.P.'s classic unofficial *mot* during the 1927 debate on the Revised Prayer Book in the House of Commons, "For God's sake don't touch the Church of England; it is the only thing that stands between us and Christianity!" is not so wide of the mark as it might at first sight appear.

I have nowhere argued that there are not many priests and clergymen who are kindly and virtuous men, devoting their lives to the service of others, seeking to do good and doing it; there always have been such men in the service of

## TRIBUTE TO CLERGYMEN

the Christian Church and they exist to-day. Helping the sick, comforting the wretched, cheering the oppressed, they are perennial well-springs of pity and consolation, dowering all those who are privileged to come into contact with them with the benison of their goodness. I would go even further, and admit that it is the inspiration of their religion and above all the example of Christ that has made these men what they are and caused them to do what they do. It would be absurd to deny the existence of such men; they constitute the bright side of Christianity, and because of them the world is a better place than it would have been without them.

But one swallow does not make a summer, nor do the honest and kindly priests compensate for the Torquemadas, the Bishops and the Popes. Besides, other religions have attracted and trained men not inferior.

And now I have said why I am not a Christian.

Yours ever,

CYRIL JOAD.

## XXV.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
KENT.  
August 19th.

DEAR JOAD,

It will be simpler, instead of refuting in detail your travesty of the Church's teaching on sex, to summarise that teaching.

St. Paul compares human marriage to the union of Christ and the Church, a comparison which disposes of your suggestion that the early Church regarded marriage with disfavour. "So ought men to love their wives," writes St. Paul, "as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself . . . and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church."

Mr. Christopher Dawson sums up St. Paul's teaching in one sentence: "As humanity is saved and deified by Christ, so the animal functions of sex and reproduction are spiritualised by the sacrament of marriage."

The primary end of marriage is the family, but there are also, as Pius XI said in the *Encyclical* from which you quote, "secondary ends such as mutual aid, the cultivation of mutual love and the *quieting of concupiscence*," which husband and wife are not forbidden to consider so long as they are subordinated to the primary end.

Marital intercourse is permitted when the wife is beyond the age of child-bearing and after conception has taken place; consequently it is absurd to suggest that the Church *only* approves of intercourse for the primary end of child-bearing.

The primary end of eating is to keep the body alive; the primary end of drinking is to satisfy thirst, but the Church does not condemn secondary ends, such as the pleasure of good food or the stimulus of wine, provided that these secondary ends are not abused. Gluttony and drunkenness

are wrong just as impurity is wrong. I do not regard your letter as a defence of sex, but as a passionate defence of sexual gluttony.

The Church realises that sex is a tremendous instinct which, if unrestrained, can ruin not only the individual but the race. Even Jung, with all his prejudices against Christianity, writes as follows: "At a time when a large part of mankind is beginning to discard Christianity, it is worth while to understand clearly why it was originally accepted. It was accepted in order to escape at last from the brutality of antiquity. As soon as we discard it, licentiousness returns, as is impressively exemplified by life in our large modern cities." Even from the standpoint of pure hedonism, there is everything to be said for self-restraint in matters of sex, as you yourself have admitted.

There lies before me as I write the summer issue of *To-day and To-morrow*. The list of contents is characteristic of our unanchored age: *Do We Need a New Religion? In Search of the New Generation; Our Dissatisfied Age; This Modernism*; and then, by a rather unhappy but amusing juxtaposition, *The Case for Sterilisation; Men of To-day*.

You write on "Our Dissatisfied Age," the fundamental cause of which, according to you, lies "in the contemporary decay of religious belief":—

"It is notorious to-day that heavenly rewards no longer attract and infernal punishments no longer deter with their pristine force; young people are frankly derisive of both, and, seeing no prospect of divine compensation in the next world for the wine and kisses that morality bids them eschew in this one, take more or less unanimously to the wine and kisses. Unfortunately the pleasurable results anticipated from these sources fail to materialise. That unchecked indulgence in the more obvious types of pleasure is unsatisfying is the unanimous teaching of those who have had the leisure and opportunity to try them in all ages. It is the more unfortunate that it is a truth which nobody believes to be true until he has discovered it for himself. . . . You cannot take the kingdom of pleasure, any more than you can take the kingdom of beauty, by storm."

One could reconstruct a great deal of the Catholic Faith from your admissions in unguarded moments.

I do not envy you your position as a modern prophet. You realise that the decline of religion coincides with a deplorable outbreak of sexual licence; you deplore it, but you are impotent to control the torrent which the Victorian rationalists released. You are clear-sighted enough to realise that young people would treat with derision any lay sermon which you may feel inclined to deliver on the evils of sexual excess. Pitiful indeed are the attempts of modern prophets, like Julian Huxley, to provide an ethical substitute for the Church. What young man or woman, I ask you, under the influence of the tremendous force of sex, is in the least likely to resist temptation because he has read *Religion Without Revelation*, or because you warn him that man cannot take the kingdom of pleasure by storm? Sexual excess cannot be subdued by a thin stream of ethical platitudes. As well try to save a burning house with a garden hose. You people are quite good at setting the house on fire, but you make a pretty poor show as a fire brigade.

Once again let me quote from Jung:—

“The meaning of Christianity and Mithraism is clear. It is a moral restraint of animal impulses. The dynamic appearance of both religions betrays something of that enormous feeling of redemption which animated the first disciples and which we to-day scarcely know how to appreciate. Those old truths are empty to us. Most certainly we should still understand them had our customs even a breath of ancient brutality, for we can hardly realise in this day the whirlwinds of the unchained libido which roared through the ancient Rome of the Cæsars.”

When that unchained libido roars through the streets of London, what are you going to do about it? What *can* you do? Our grandfathers questioned the Christian creed while professing a passionate devotion for the Christian code; our contemporaries treat both creed and code with equal derision. They have no use for the old men of Moldavia. You know the rhyme:—

## BIRTH CONTROL

"There was an old man of Moldavia  
Who did not believe in his Saviour,  
But erected instead, with himself as the head,  
A religion of dec'rous behaviour."

I am amused by the Bishop of Quimper's abhorrence of bare knees, and I am not in the least inclined to pooh-pooh the passion for chastity which occasionally finds rather absurd expression. It is not surprising that an occasional priest should be guilty of exaggeration in this tremendous fight against "the unchained libido."

And now for birth control. In your criticism of the Papal *Encyclical* you have fallen into a very natural error. The *Encyclical* does not make clear the distinction between the natural law and the law of nature. Possibly the translation is slightly at fault. Natural law forbids a man to hurl himself from the summit of the Eiffel Tower, but it is the law of nature that if a man drops a thousand feet he will be killed. If the Pope taught that to interfere with the intentions of nature is equivalent to interfering with the intentions of God, Catholics would be forbidden to cut down a tree or to dam a river, which would palpably be absurd. The natural law allows the Pope to cut his nails but forbids him to cut his throat.

You are wrong to accuse the Church of objecting to birth control. The Church objects to contraceptives, a very different matter. Birth control by abstinence or by the use of the "safe period" (which is not much less safe than most contraceptives) is not forbidden.

If, for grave reasons such as health, other additions to the family are undesirable, it is the duty of husband and wife to abstain. If they do not, and if either of them refuses to abstain, the Church cannot be blamed for the consequences. Sin and selfishness often involve the innocent in suffering.

I admit that such abstinence is difficult, and the more difficult it seems to you, the more you should be impressed by the power of grace which enables married Catholics to practise abstinence. I cheerfully admit that the Church's teaching on birth control is responsible for some hard cases, but "hard cases make bad laws," and against these hard cases must be set the testimony of medical men as to the evil

results of contraceptives. Space will only permit one quotation. Dr. McCann, who is consulting gynæcologist to the West End Hospital for Nervous Diseases, writes as follows: "Besides being the wrong method of dealing with the question of birth control, contraceptives are dangerous and harmful to any woman who would use them. There is, in my view, not one of these appliances that is not either injurious or unhealthy. It is a truism to say that one should not interfere with Nature, but it is one which many people have forgotten. The extensive use of these things invariably produces some form of ill-health, together with a general distress of the mind."

You would not suspect Mrs. Naomi Mitchison, an advanced modern, of any tenderness for Catholic teaching, and her pamphlet, *Comments on Birth Control*, would therefore give you much food for thought.

Your general remarks on the Church's attitude to birth control contain more than your usual ration of mis-statements. "The Church," you say, "had previously stigmatised the natural passions as so wicked that no Christian should be permitted to indulge in them." You cannot, of course, quote any official pronouncement of the Church to this effect. I won't even bother to ask you to withdraw or to apologise for this grotesque charge. You would probably reply by quoting the remarks of some desert ascetic, for you have yet to realise the distinction between the official teaching of the Church and the remarks of individual churchmen. The Church, which exists to correct the extravagances of individuals, has consistently fought, from St. Paul onwards, for the sane view of sex, and the Inquisition, as I have reminded you, was founded very largely to suppress heretics who "stigmatised the natural passions as wicked." You quote the Pope's statement that the Church "does not bid the wife to obey her husband's every request *when such a request is not in keeping with reason*," from which even you might have deduced that a Catholic wife is under no obligation to cohabit with a lunatic or a drunkard or a husband afflicted with contagious disease. Why, oh why, do you never take the trouble to find out what the Church teaches before proceeding to lay down the law in this ignorant fashion? All

that the Church says is that it is wrong for a wife to refuse intercourse without good reason.

The commonsense view of the matter is admirably expressed by Chaucer. The saintly Custance retires with her spouse:

“They go to bed as it was skill and right,  
For though that wives be full holy things,  
They musten take in patience a-night  
Such manner necessities, as be pleasings  
To folk that have yweddeth them with rings  
And lay a little their holiness aside.”

I have modernised the spelling, for I suspect that you have not deigned to master the dialect of a poet foolish enough to be born between those fatal dates 1309 and 1452. Incidentally you would learn a great deal more about the Middle Ages from Chaucer than from Lecky. Chaucer represents the commonsense view of the average man, and as a corrective let me quote from Father Bede Jarrett's admirable book, *Social Theories of the Middle Ages*: “Robert Holcot of the Dominicans argues from the Masters of the Sentences, and following up his line of thought, that a man whose motive in such an act is merely coarse and carnal has spoilt the perfection of it and has imported into it the taint of sin: ‘The man has lost,’ such is the delicate expression of this exquisite writer, ‘all sense of the personality of his wife. He might as well be a mere animal and miss the meaning of human love.’”

Your real objection, however, to the Church's teaching on sex is that the Church objects to “unlicensed relationship.” You hail the discovery of contraceptives as a great scientific advance on the grounds “that it is now possible for women to have sexual intercourse with persons other than their husbands without visible effect. Birth control,” you triumphantly announce, “in enabling the pleasures of sex to be tasted without its penalties has removed the most formidable deterrent not only to regular but to irregular sexual intercourse.” I thank you for your candour. The older generation of free-thinkers indignantly repudiated the mere suggestion that the Christian moral code would not survive the Christian creed, but this age has left the old man of Moldavia behind. The struggle between the Church and its opponents



was confused in the seventies by the fact that free-thinkers were still living on Christian capital. To-day there is no such confusion: we shall soon witness a straight fight between the Church and the "unchained libido" of a world relapsing into paganism. I am glad that you have come forward so boldly as the advocate of that "*shameless*, harmless and unlimited pleasure which birth control offers to the young." I am impressed by the lyrical enthusiasm with which you welcome science as an ally against the Church. I admire the courage with which you advance to the assault armed with the weapons which science has invented for the sapping of the Catholic code. But I doubt if the Royal Society will thank you for your compliments to the humanising effects of contraceptive science.

Of course there are two Joads, the Joad who realises the inevitable consequences of sexual license and the Joad who attacks the Church for objecting to sexual license.

In every age the Church demands sacrifices from its members. The early Christian had to choose between apostasy and a cruel death. The modern Christian may be faced with the alternatives of an abstinence which is difficult or of surrender to practices which the Church condemns.

The Church is well aware that modern life makes it increasingly difficult for urban dwellers to rear large families. The modern concludes that the Church should adapt its teaching to the requirements of modern civilisation. The Church replies that it is for the modern State to rectify a state of affairs which is unnatural and unhealthy. The Church which puts the family first and the State second is the one power which can offer an effective resistance to the ever-growing pretensions of the modern State.

You conclude your letter with some pleasant remarks about Christ, which is very nice of you, but for the life of me I cannot see why you should admire him. There is, I know, a conspiracy among moderns to patronise Christ while attacking his teaching, perhaps because many moderns assume that Christ was a sort of socialistic pacifist. You attack the Church because the Church teaches that this world is "a place of chastening, a vale of tears and an abode of sin." So did Christ. You attack the conception of an

omnipotent deity which Christ preached; you attack the doctrine of hell which we accept on the authority of Christ; you attack the Church's teaching on sex which is derived directly from Christ. Why not be honest and admit that it is impossible to admire Christ and to hate his Church?

And now let me sum up my criticisms of your part of our joint correspondence. I have much to thank you for. I thank you for the vigour of your attack, and for the readable quality of your letters. I am grateful for the Vice-Chancellor's views on trains, and for the Bishop of Quimper's views on trousers, and I am grateful to you—I am not being ironic—for giving me a chance to refute all those mistakes and misunderstandings about the Church which are so common in uninstructed circles.

I appreciate your admirable good humour. People who did not know us might imagine from this correspondence that we disliked each other intensely, which is far from being the case. It is very pleasant to argue these points with an opponent who does not object to hard hitting.

My chief complaint is that your attitude to the Church is lacking in chivalry and generosity. You have never made the least effort to master even in outline the history of the Church or to approach with sympathetic understanding the problems with which the Church has been confronted. Your invariable habit is to ascribe the foulest motive to churchmen. You tell me that philosophy is your job, but there is no hint of the philosophic temper in your attitude to the Church. Sometimes, indeed, you descend to mere Hyde Park ranting, as when you state that the obligation to attend Mass "leaves the well-to-do unaffected and operates against the pleasures of the poor." This remark is meaningless. An even more glaring example of your determination to represent the Church in an odious light is the infantile reasoning of passages such as the following: "The real nature of the Church's objection" to unauthorised sexual relations "is that of the Trade Union objecting to one of its members taking a job at an unauthorised rate of wages." If you were an honest critic you would have given the Church credit for refusing to tone down Christ's teaching on sex in order to win the approval of the world. In every case you have begun

by assuming the most discreditable motives, and have then proceeded to torture the facts of the evidence to fit your theory. You make the wildest accusations without trying to test their accuracy; you proceed on the Darwinian principle that if you throw enough mud, the mud which is fittest to survive will somehow stick.

I have been impressed by the mutually contradictory attacks which you have launched. You have attacked the Church for attempting to frustrate the sexual instincts of man, and for stigmatising as a sin the frustration of those instincts. You have attacked Christians as sadists because they believe in Hell, and you have poured contempt on the Puritans for objecting to the sadism which delights in watching bull-baiting. It is, by the way, a constant surprise to me that intelligent people can quote Macaulay's shallow remarks on that subject. You attack the Church because it frustrates the maternal instincts of a nun, and because it defends the maternal instincts against the advocates of contraceptives. You attack Christians for refusing to take Christ's teaching seriously, and you attack them still more venomously when they take Christ seriously on the subject of Hell and sex.

I am not alone in criticising your attitude as essentially subjective, prejudiced and irrational. The *New Statesman*, an organ of advanced views, in the course of a favourable review of your amusing autobiography, writes as follows: "The point is surely that, like all truly unintellectual people, Mr. Joad's tastes are based on pre-judgment rather than judgment: he dislikes even *before* he sees, hears, or reads whatever is unlike the hard, bright, purposeful world of Shaw and Wells. He even goes so far as to imply the impossibility of the existence of another world or another attitude."

An admirable summary of your attitude to the supernatural world and to the Christian attitude.

Yours ever,  
ARNOLD LUNN.

## XXVI.

4, EAST HEATH ROAD,  
HAMPSTEAD, N.W. 3.  
*August 23rd, 1932.*

MY DEAR LUNN,

I am conscious of having with your very considerable assistance exceeded the space allotted to my positive statement, so this must be a very brief note of reply.

First as to your twenty-third letter! I was careful to point out that my twenty-second was written in the country away from books of reference. I doubt, however, if matters would have been very different had they been available. The Dark and Middle Ages seem to constitute a period, or, if you like, two periods, in regard to which almost any and every assertion can be and has been made, and with equal show of authority can be and has been denied. Through such a maze of conflicting authorities we are neither of us competent to find our way. No doubt from amid such a chorus we can each of us with the exercise of sufficient ingenuity and patience find plenty of voices to support our own cases:

*"Hic liber est in quo quærit sua dogmata quisque,  
Invenit et in quo dogmata quisque sua"—*

and continued controversy would take the form of accumulating an increasing number of confronting and refuting quotations, until in mutual exasperation we metaphorically shied the books of our authorities at one another's heads.

This being so, I content myself with noting the following points which struck me as significant:

(1) You yourself quote an authority to the effect that the Copernican system was placed by the Church on the index. Now the Copernican system is true; at least, it was the nearest thing to the truth known at the time. I, if you remember, was concerned to argue that the Church had retarded discovery and impeded the knowledge of truth. Comment seems needless.

(2) You cite many examples to show that the Church did not persecute scholars or prohibit their books. You then proceed to excuse it for doing both by drawing a distinction between Catholicism and Catholic government, and pointing out that Catholicism must not be held accountable for the follies of its government officials. Apart from the difficulty of seeing, if governments are not to be judged by what they do, what criterion is to be applied to them, I do not understand why it should be necessary to offer this excuse for repressive follies and cruelties which the indignant tone of your letter would lead one to suppose were never committed.

(3) I agree with you that most men are by nature intolerant, hold no brief for the B.M.A., and both think and have often said that the attitude of science to psychical research is indefensibly obscurantist; therefore, to take a leaf from your own book, I beg you not to waste space by pushing open doors. But these considerations which you adduce with such an air of triumph do not meet the point. If Christianity, as you hold, is efficacious in practice, in the sense that it alters men's conduct for the better, then its paid exponents and officials ought to be a shining example of men's tolerance and charity, and not an object lesson in their cruelty and folly. Christ bade His followers love one another; Christianity, indeed, is the great religion of love; yet the love which the Church seems most prominently to have engendered is a great love for a great hate. If Christianity as practised by its official exponents makes men behave no better, and has often caused them to behave very much worse than their fellows, why should it be expected to commend itself to me?

(4) "Virgil was looked upon as half a Christian." Quite! "Scholasticism 'inculcated one valuable habit of . . . sticking to the point when found.'" Certainly; and by sticking to the Aristotelian logic and steadily begging all its questions by insisting on regarding philosophy as a branch of theology, it congealed human speculation for hundreds of years.

(5) Sorry to have hurt you about Venice! I was wrong and I withdraw. I admire Van Eyck and Memling as much as you do, and shall be glad to modify my remarks about European culture to the extent to which this confession

demands; but one swallow does not make a summer, and please remember that two-thirds of Memling's life occurred after the date (1452) with which the period I cited ended. The writings of Petrarch and Chaucer do not entitle us to postulate a culture any more than the Jews are entitled to be considered cultured because Isaiah and Jeremiah were poets of genius. And where, please, do I say that "the Church . . . welcomed with enthusiasm Arabic discoveries in Algebra and Trigonometry" and confuse the Middle Ages with the Dark? Please answer this.

I come now to your twenty-fifth letter. This seems to me to be vitiated throughout by your mistaken view that I believe there to be a *necessary* relation between the decline of Christianity and the growth of license. This mistake leads you to represent me as holding that the influence of the Churches constitutes the sole barrier against an orgy of license and as hailing the weakening of the barrier with glee because I approve of license. As I hold no such beliefs, most of your letter is beside the point.

It is, I think, probably true, as the quotation you cite from an article of mine suggests, that the decay of religious beliefs in our time has produced a temporary phase of world weariness among young people, because they have insisted on regarding the patent obsolescence of the cardinal Christian doctrines as conferring upon them a charter to indulge their instincts; but they pretty quickly get over that, if only because, as I point out in the same article, the life whose *raison d'être* is the indulgence of instincts is a profoundly boring one, with the result that, like the Rationalists of the last century, the emancipated young are speedily to be found living lives of unimpeachable moral correctitude and equally unimpeachable dullness.

Nor do I find this surprising. I don't believe, as you apparently do, that the heart of man is desperately wicked, and that human beings are only restrained from the unlimited indulgence of their passions by rules based on authority and backed by threats. My experience, on the contrary, is that people thrown helpless on their passions will find that honesty, that self-respect, that hatred of cowardice and de-  
and, the desire for cleanliness, health, and efficiency

are master passions disciplining them far more effectively than the artificial inhibitions of a mediæval morality based on an obsolete religion and deriving its power from lethargy and fear. In other words, I tend on the whole to trust human beings to behave themselves, and, even if they don't, think that good conduct which is enforced by fear of consequences, human and divine, is not much more worth having than bad. This being so, I am not impressed by your picture of an "unchained libido roaring through the streets of London," which I regard as a comic offspring of the license of your imagination rather than of that of our future descendants. In fact, I see no reason to suppose that the streets of a London in which nobody believed in Christianity would in this matter of "unchained libido" be very different from those of Pekin, Baghdad, Bombay, or any other non-Christian city, or, indeed, from what they are to-day when very few pay any attention to the Christianity which they still profess. Moreover, both of us have, if I am not mistaken, paid our tribute to the somewhat forbidding morality of contemporary Rationalists.

As regards birth control, you will, I am sure, agree that up to the present I have maintained a respectful attitude to your quotations. When I have thought their authority dubious or their content frivolous, I have refrained from saying so; there is no room in this correspondence for the game of capping authorities. But when you trot out the celebrated Dr. McCann to testify that contraceptives are prejudicial to the health of women, I regard it as a friendly office to one for whom I have every respect to beg you not to let yourself be taken in by what, I assure you, is all "eye-wash." Why, man alive, don't you know that the health of the population as a whole has so immeasurably improved during the last fifty years, that an average life expectation of thirty-five, in 1870, has been superseded by one of fifty-seven to-day? Yet this is precisely the period during which contraceptives have passed into general use. But, if figures don't impress you, go and look first at a birth-control practising wife in your middle-class suburb with her one or two children and then at a Catholic working-class wife in Dublin or Glasgow with half a dozen children at her skirts, and come

## CHURCH'S LACK OF CHIVALRY

back and tell me, if you have the face, that the second is more healthy than the first.

Your talk about the duty of continence does more credit to your good intentions than to your common sense. What chance has a working-class woman of practising continence with a drunken husband on a Saturday night?

I thank you for your compliments on my good humour. Apparently, too, you think I can make unrighteousness readable; but this should not surprise you, knowing, as you must, how the devil looks after his own. You shall have your own bouquet later when you have finished your part of the job. Meanwhile, it is pleasant to record my hearty agreement with your repudiation of the view, which the unlettered might derive from a reading of this correspondence, that we dislike each other intensely. On the contrary . . . but, as I have said, bouquets at the end.

I conclude with a couple of observations on your passage of general criticism and comment. You say that I am lacking in chivalry and generosity to the Church. Probably! But how much generosity and chivalry has the Church shown to me and my like? It has reviled, persecuted, imprisoned, ruined, exiled, starved, tortured, burnt and executed us. Even your hero Aquinas tells me that one of your rewards as "saved" will be to watch my eternal torments as "damned." Scarcely a very chivalrous attitude to adopt towards a defeated opponent! For hundreds of years we could not get a hearing; even to-day it is much easier to obtain publicity for pro-Christian than for anti-Christian arguments, or to get a salaried post in any capacity as a professed believer rather than as a professed sceptic. I can think of no single generous gesture that the Church has made to its opponents; it has been too busy consigning them to hell. Well, since you have started this Latin quotation habit,

*"Semper ego auditor tantum? Nunquamne reponam?"*

That, at least, is my mood, and I propose, with your leave, to be as stiff-necked as the Church.

Secondly, you and I have both protested—it is our main intellectual bond—against the glib modern habit of enquiring into the origins of a man's views as a means of damning them.



C. E. M. J. TO A. L.

We are both agreed, are we not, that an account of the circumstances in which and the reasons for which X was led to assert Y, although possibly important as history or psychology, has no bearing upon the validity of Y, and that this modern weapon for discrediting the views of an opponent by considering why he was led to form them is illegitimate? Very well, then, it ill becomes you to delve into my past or to speculate about my psychology—my unfortunate Protestant ancestry, the business of the two Joads and so forth—when your job is to consider my views. Treat them on their merits, if you please, and refute them if you can, but don't trouble our readers with speculations as to why they are mine.

Yours ever,  
C. E. M. JOAD.

## XXVII.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY.  
September 12th, 1932.

MY DEAR JOAD,

I find your letter waiting me on my return from Venice.

The robust dogmatism of your earlier attacks on mediæval culture has faded into a wistful scepticism in which you suggest that almost any and every assertion about the Middle Ages can be and has been made "with an equal *show* of authority." Perhaps, but it is the business of the critic to discriminate between authority and its *show*. That statements as opposite as yours and mine can be made "with equal authority" is a compromise which you have good reason to offer, and which I have even better reason to reject. You have stated that the Church "regarded secular knowledge as either impious or unnecessary." I reply that the curriculum of Universities founded by the Church included secular learning. This is a question of fact, on which you are wrong. Why not admit that you are wrong and have done with it? That the mediæval university had as clear and generous a comprehension of culture as any modern University is perhaps a question of opinion, but, if you dispute Huxley's verdict, you must tell me why. I decline to be browbeaten by unnamed authorities.

In reply to your question;—a man who writes with your contempt for the fourteenth century must not grumble if he is reminded of the things that Mr. Bernard Shaw has said about those who "confuse the Middle Ages and the Dark Ages." You stated in your letter, I see, that medicine and astronomy were kept going by the Mohammedans and reached Europe via the Moors. My remark about Arabic algebra was true to the spirit of the accusation, though inaccurate as to the actual wording.

So much for your questions on points of detail.

I don't mind your harping on Galileo, for you have precious little else to harp on so far as this particular issue is

concerned. Once, and once only, the Church has officially invaded the sphere of science, and she has never been allowed to forget her blunder on that occasion. Scientists, however, are perpetually invading the sphere of the theologian. The condemnation of Galileo was an admitted blunder, but, as you remark, one swallow does not make a summer; nor does one scientific martyr in nineteen centuries justify all this outcry about a conflict between the Church and science. "In the generation which saw the Thirty Years War," writes Professor Whitehead, F.R.S., "and remembered Alva in the Netherlands, the worst that happened to men of science was that Galileo suffered an honourable detention and a mild reproof before dying peaceably in bed." Again, an occasional blunder by an official in the Censorship department does not justify a general charge of persecuting scholars. If the Church persecuted scholars, how did the Renaissance achieve its triumphs in Papal Rome?

I agree with you that Governments must be judged by what they do, but a country is not necessarily to be judged by its Government. All that a Roman Catholic, for instance, would claim is that Christ guaranteed that the Church should be preserved from teaching error, and that members of the Church who patterned their lives on him would be better than those who did not. The first twelve apostles included Peter who denied him, and Judas who betrayed him. Perhaps Christ meant to prepare us for the betrayals of those who held high office in his Church.

On the question of intolerance you have changed your ground. You began by drawing an imaginary contrast between the detached unbiassed scientist and the bigoted churchman. You have surrendered that untenable position, and content yourself with the more modest claim that, though there is little to choose between intolerant Churchmen and intolerant scientists, the officials of Christianity ought to be shining examples of tolerance.

I have already pointed out that as the scientist makes no claim to supernatural inspiration he has no justification for intolerance, but that the Church which was founded to protect supernatural truth and to save sinners from Hell has every reason to wage relentless war on heresy. Christ preached a

religion of love, but there is a stern note in his teaching which you forget. The heresiarch "through whom offences come" was the object of his very special condemnation. "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he be cast into the sea than that he should offend one of these little ones." Christ was intolerant of sin, though infinitely gentle to the repentant sinner, and the Church has tried with greater or less success to follow his example. "Love men, hate error." I admit that the Church has not always lived up to St. Augustine's great precept *Diligite homines, interficite errores*, but the Church is governed by men subject to human failings. And when we see the disastrous effects of heresy, need we wonder that the Church blindly fought for European unity and used weapons which we all condemn? They saw you on the horizon, my dear Joad, and that made them jumpy. I remember a distinguished Socialist and agnostic remarking to me at the end of the war: "We have persecuted the heretics against our modern religion, shot them in Germany and France and imprisoned them in England. The Inquisition at least persecuted for a noble ideal, the unity of Europe which was destroyed by the religion of nationalism."

You had better read the famous passage from Aquinas in its setting before you lay down the law as to St. Thomas's meaning.

You must not blame me if you left me under the impression that you had detected a necessary relationship between the decline of Christianity and the growth of licence. "Scepticism about the universe," you write, "leads to a way of life which is apt to be found unsatisfying. Where everything is uncertain the doctrine 'let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die,' at once concrete and definite, is eagerly embraced."

I do not believe that the "heart of man" is desperately wicked; I merely hold with Jung and Joad that sex is a tremendously strong force which, if uncurbed, leads to trouble. I agree that religion is not the only possible curb; the effects of excess on the body are apt to produce self-restraint even among those who do not bother about the effects of excess on the soul. Jung's contention (*Jung's* please note) that the decay of Christianity is followed by a recrudescence of licence is, however, more than justified by the recent history of Russia,

which is the one country that has officially adopted atheism as its state religion.

Although I defend the Christian code, I have neither the right nor the inclination to condemn those who find that code very difficult to live up to; my criticism is reserved for those who attack the code itself.

Limits of space alone prevent me replying to your remarks about birth control. The greater expectation of life is *post* rather than *propter* the invention of contraceptives. Read *Judgment on Birth Control* (Shed and Ward) for the Roman Catholic case on this vexed question.

I agree with your contention that a man's arguments cannot be disposed of by diagnosing his motives, but, as I remarked in *The Flight from Reason*, "if you convict a writer of bad logic or weak reasoning, you are entitled to hold a post-mortem and diagnose 'bias,' but the post-mortem must follow and not precede the 'mors'. . . . Once a man has been fairly convicted of unreason, it is often profitable to seek for the explanation of his sin against sound logic, but you must prove the crime before you begin to reconstruct it."

You cannot complain that I have failed to meet your arguments, and if, as an afterthought, I have tried to explain your remarks about the Middle Ages, as the result of a Puritan background, I was merely taking a leaf out of your own book. The most interesting fact about our correspondence is your lordly disregard of *all* arguments whereby Christianity is usually defended. You display no consciousness of the fact that the case for Christianity is based on the historic evidence for events which took place nineteen centuries ago. You are a victim of that "glib modern habit," which you denounce, "of enquiring into a man's views as a means of damning them." You ignore the classic arguments for the existence of God and devote a great deal of space to enquiring how and why men believe in the Christian God; you ignore the arguments for the belief in Hell and you confine yourself to diagnosing sadism as an explanation of why man wanted to believe in Hell.

Similarly you never pause to reflect on what can be said for the Church's teaching on sex, and you explain that teaching not by a consideration of its historic origin in the teaching

of Christ, but by ascribing to ecclesiastics all manner of disgusting motives. If, as you have said, the reason why X was led to assert Y has no bearing upon the validity of Y, it is difficult to understand the vast space which you have devoted to the reasons by which the Church was led to assert the doctrines of which you disapprove so strongly.

The question as to whether Christ rose from the dead or whether God does or does not give evidence of his existence by means of miracles, must be decided by the evidence alone. A conviction that God does not intrude into the affairs of this planet, which is based on other than rational grounds, is as private and personal a thing as toothache. It is also as incommunicable. You can convince me that you hold this conviction; I believe indeed that you do, but no amount of such assertion could communicate it to me or convince me that your conviction is justified. Therefore I submit that your faith in the blind routine of nature must be ruled out of this correspondence. I shall expect facts, not the reiteration of your faith.

Very well then; we will now leave the *mar sì crudele* of your attack on Christianity, and I will proceed to direct "the little ship of my wit" across better waters.

Per correr miglior acqua alza le vele  
 omai la navicella del mio ingegno  
 che lascia retro a sè mar sì crudele.

The Christian argument begins with the existence of God. My difficulty is one of space. I therefore propose to assume the existence of God for the moment. I do this the more readily because the arguments for Theism will appear in my book with Haldane; moreover, you yourself are prepared to concede that a deity may exist, provided that the said deity has no responsibility for our planet. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word said 'Je m'enfiche.'"

I wish that I had space to criticise this, the most self-contradictory of all theistic philosophies, but I reluctantly content myself with remarking that God, like Mr. Asquith in 1916, does not readily consent "to be relegated to the position of an irresponsible spectator." You have admitted that God may exist, and my job is therefore to defend the Christian

conception of God, a conception which we receive on the authority of Christ. Christ vindicated his authority by rising from the dead, and as the resurrection is recorded in the Gospels our first problem is to investigate the authority of the Gospels.

The theory that it is the Christian who twists facts in support of a preconceived thesis finds no support in the history of biblical criticism. It was Strauss and other members of the German school who adjusted their facts to fit their faith, their faith in the unreality of the supernatural. "In the person and acts of Jesus," wrote Strauss, "no supernaturalism shall be allowed to remain. He who would banish priests from the Church must first banish miracles from religion." The bias is obvious.

Now if we approach this problem with no *a priori* dogmas and with an open mind on the question of the supernatural we shall, I hold, arrive at the orthodox conclusion. There is no need for the Christian to fit his facts to his thesis, for his thesis develops naturally out of the facts. If it were not for this violent bias against the supernatural, the traditional authorship of the Gospels would not be questioned. If we were to treat the works of classical literature with the same rigorous scrutiny that is used towards the New Testament, few indeed could stand the test.

Professor Salmon reminds us that an attempt was made to prove that the first six books of the *Annals of Tacitus* were forged in the fifteenth century. There is only one allusion to those books prior to the fifteenth century, a doubtful allusion three hundred years later than Tacitus. Again, the theory that some of Horace's odes were written in the Dark Ages by monks is no more silly than some of the theories which have been advanced by some of the German critics of the Gospels.

In recent years there has been a great reaction towards traditional views. Harnack, at one time an advanced radical of critical outlook, created a sensation by informing the astonished world of German scholarship that the chronological framework within which tradition had arranged the original documents was correct in all essential points.

Within the limits of my space I cannot hope to summarise

the evidence, but if you do not accept the traditional authorship of the Gospels I am prepared to challenge any alternative theory which you advance, provided and provided only that you take the trouble to "mug up" the evidence.

Similarly I shall expect you either to accept or to refute the verdict of that great archæologist Sir William Ramsay. Ramsay went to Asia Minor convinced that *The Acts* was a second-century document. He devoted years to studying the inscriptions in Asia Minor, with the result that he came to the conclusion that the "Travel Document" which is a large part of *The Acts* was the most reliable authority on the state of the Roman Empire in *the first century*. Do you dispute this verdict?

You must clearly consider that the Gospels are reliable up to a point, for you tell me you admire Christ and his teaching, and our only authority for that teaching is the record in the New Testament.

So far as the internal evidence is concerned you need only re-read the Gospels to criticise the remainder of this letter.

Nobody who has tried to write a novel would admit that unsophisticated Jews, with no literary training and with no knowledge of the technique of fiction, could have created *ex nihilo* a character such as Jesus. If the Gospels are fiction, then the Evangelists have beaten the greatest masters of fiction at their own game. Neither Chaucer nor Shakespeare nor Tolstoi nor Balzac nor Dickens can hold a candle to the Evangelists. The Evangelists were not experienced writers, and yet they avoid the commonest mistake of the young novelist. The novice always labels his characters; he insists that his hero is witty or is brave. The old hand avoids labels, just as the Evangelists avoid labels; he makes his hero *say* witty or *do* brave things. The Evangelists are severely economical of epithets; they quote Christ's words of condemnation or of praise, but they seldom add a comment of their own, as if they feared to spoil a masterpiece. This austere restraint persists even in the record of the great betrayal. "*Then he having received the sop went out immediately: and it was night.*" The door opens and for a moment a shadowy figure is outlined against the starry sky before it passes out into the darkness. "*And it was night. . . .*" That



touch suggests the eye-witness to anybody who has ever tried to write.

Nothing, again, could be simpler and more quietly effective than the last words of the chapter which describes St. Peter's betrayal in the Gospel which St. Peter is traditionally supposed to have inspired. "*And Peter called to mind the words that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice thou shalt deny me thrice. And he wept.*"

It is this iron objectivity which makes the Gospels so convincing. No adjectives, no comments. The picture is painted with the bare minimum of necessary strokes. *Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother and his mother's sister.* Nothing more, and for nineteen centuries Christians have been trying to find words big enough to describe, and art great enough to translate, what *his mother and his mother's sister* felt, but they have added little to St. John's bleak statement of objective fact.

Men who have passed through such experiences are drained of emotion. Words seem to them poor things with which to describe what they have felt, and consequently they content themselves with stating as shortly and as simply as possible what they have seen and heard. Do you know Thomas Herbert's account of Charles I's last hours? Herbert, who was passionately devoted to his royal master, attended him on the scaffold. On his way to the execution, Charles gave Herbert his watch and told him to keep it in his memory, "which Mr. Herbert keeps accordingly." And that is all. A fiction writer would have been tempted to embroider this incident. "Herbert in the days which were to come could never look at the watch without recalling the last sad hours before he parted for ever from the master whom he had served so faithfully. The familiar dial recalled," etc., but you can't improve on the quiet objectivity of "which Mr. Herbert keeps accordingly." Truth is often more artistic than fiction, and I do not believe that St. John was a Jewish Balzac; I do not credit him with inventing the most perfect of all short stories both in form and in substance. The story of the woman taken in adultery does not occur in the early Greek manuscripts, but none the less I am convinced that this story was recorded by an eye-witness.

*"And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, and those heard him not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. They which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last. And Jesus was left alone, standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."*

The greatest masters of the short story might conceivably have invented that sublime touch, Jesus stooping down to write in the dust, but none of them would have been content to leave us in ignorance of what Christ wrote. Had Tolstoi invented this story, Christ would have been made to sum up in one pregnant sentence Tolstoi's own philosophy of life. Tolstoi, Balzac, Dickens or Rudyard Kipling; one can well imagine the story as each of them would have written it, and one can well imagine their attempts to decipher that writing in the dust. But the eye-witness is content to leave Christ's literary composition undecoded precisely because he was present at this scene, and for some reason or other, the intervening crowd perhaps, he did not see what Christ wrote. He does not tell us what Christ wrote because he does not know.

It would be interesting to reread this story as a modern might have written it. I think it would have ended rather differently. "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin again," sounds quite probable.

Yours ever,  
ARNOLD LUNN.

## XXVIII.

4, EAST HEATH ROAD,  
HAMPSTEAD, N.W. 3.  
20th September, 1932.

MY DEAR LUNN,

The first half of your letter consists of your comments on my comments on your comments on my twenty-second letter, which was in itself in part an answer to the outraged protests excited by the account in my twentieth of the Churches' reception of new knowledge.

We must, I think, draw the line somewhere, and after expressing my surprised amusement that you should have been duped by the English press into accepting the vulgar belief in the unrestrained sexual license of Bolshevik Russia—it is, in fact, without exception the most decorously Puritan country I have visited; so much so, that the returning traveller, affronted by the sudden contrast presented by the undressed women whose pictures adorn the covers of our magazines and advertisement hoardings, finds himself blushing for the presumed omnipresent sexual desire of our countrymen—and registering a mild protest at your surprising accusation that I have ignored the arguments for the existence of a creative God, when I devoted most of my fourth letter to examining and answering them, I propose to leave the matter where it is and come at once to the second half.

Here I find you trailing your dialectical coat in front of me, in the hope, apparently, that I shall be provoked into denying the authenticity of the Gospels and the historicity of Christ. I am sorry not to be able to oblige you.

Having spent part of the summer in sampling the immense mass of literature which has grown up round the subject, having ranged from the militant rationalism of J. M. Robertson to the Christian reasonableness of your own Harnack, and having with the greatest difficulty managed to concentrate my mind on a controversy which in point of boring sterility has the Shakespeare-Bacon polemics beaten to a frazzle, I gladly make you a present of the following conclusions:

First, that as the early codices of the Gospels are Greek manuscripts of the fourth century and the Syrian ones are almost certainly translations from the Greek, the expert palæographer has no difficulty in arriving at whatever conclusions as to their authorship and date happen to suit his own beliefs. I notice, however, that he never succeeds in convincing the other experts unless they begin by believing as he does. Hence, your charge that Strauss and his school fit the facts into the framework of a pre-existing faith, though probably true, is double-edged in the sense that in the existing state of the evidence both sides can do this with impunity, and both sides do.

Secondly, there *do*, nevertheless, seem to be good grounds for supposing that the Gospels were written within the lifetime of Jesus's contemporaries. They are as follows: All four evangelists, much as they may differ on other points, end on a note of expectancy in regard to the Second Coming. All agree in declaring that Jesus positively promised this during the lifetime of His contemporaries. As the narratives are palpably those of believers, and as Jesus's error in this matter would have seriously discredited them, had it been known to be an error, the evangelists would, it seems to me, quite certainly have omitted the promise, if there was no longer any chance of its being kept. As they do not omit it, I infer that some of those who were alive when Jesus made the promise were still living when the Gospels were written. The conclusion seems to be that the Gospels were compiled from narratives written in the first century A.D., and I see no good grounds for doubting St. John's claim to be an eyewitness of the events which he records.

Thirdly, for this and other reasons, I am prepared to accept as probable the view that there was a person called Jesus, that the Gospels are a record of His life and teaching, and that they may quite well have been written by the individuals to whom they are traditionally attributed. I do not positively assert that these things are so, but, as you say, the evidence for them seems at least as good as the grounds for believing in the authorship of other celebrated books which is not usually questioned.

Here, however, we part company. Your reasoning seems

to be as follows: First, the Higher Criticism has not really shaken the authenticity of the Gospels; second, the Gospels tell the story of Jesus; therefore, conclusion, everything that the Gospels tell us about Jesus is true and must be accepted. This, I say, is the conclusion implied in your letter, and the line which you took in a discussion which I once had with you on the Resurrection confirms the implication.

Now apart from the fact that the Gospels occasionally give contradictory accounts of the same happening, that they contain palpable interpolations—for example, the story of the divine birth, which is an obvious leaf taken out of the book of the Roman Emperors to square with the demands of current mythology (interesting, by the way, that St. Paul knows nothing of the story and teaches that Jesus came into the world as the son of Joseph), and which contradicts both the two genealogies (which are incidentally different genealogies) establishing the descent of Jesus from David given by St. Matthew and St. Luke—apart, I say, from such contradictions, which are fairly numerous, it seems to me that one has to consider in regard to any reported incident whether it is antecedently and on other grounds probable. If it is not—if, for example, it is miraculous or inherently unlikely, and especially if it looks like an adaptation for Christian purposes of traditions common to other religions—then my general acceptance of the Gospels as probably in the main veridical would not give me a moment's pause in rejecting it. In other words, I regard the Gospels not as inspired documents to be swallowed whole, but as a patchwork of stories, some true and some false, to be criticised and accepted or rejected in the light of one's reason and common sense. What is and is not, in my view, antecedently probable will no doubt appear if you start a discussion on the Resurrection or the Virgin Birth.

If it were not for my surmise that it will shortly be invoked to justify belief in these alleged occurrences, I should not stay to comment on your argument from the literary charm of the Gospels and the internal consistency of their central figure. As it is, I had better put on record my view that the literary charm of the Gospels, which, by the way, I heartily endorse, has no evidential value whatever.

The argument seems to be as follows: The Gospels are extraordinarily well written from the purely literary point of view; in fact, they are works of art. There can be only two explanations: either the evangelists were all four of them great artists, which on the face of it would be an extremely unlikely coincidence, or they are transcribing a faithful record of actual fact. The latter supposition is reinforced by a marked and welcome refusal to gild the emotional lily and the very significant failure to tell us what Christ wrote in the dust.

My difficulty is that the argument proves too much. It proves too much by applying equally well to the case of Robinson Crusoe. Here again you have the same bare recital of apparent fact, you have the same emotional restraint, you have the same "iron objectivity." Therefore, if the argument is valid, it proves that Robinson Crusoe is a faithful record of historical fact instead of being a monument to the consummate literary artistry of Defoe. It proves too much because, where you have inconsistent accounts of the same incident, it requires us to suppose that both are true. For example, St. Matthew describes a visit of wise men led by a star bringing gifts of gold to Joseph's house, and tells us that an angel announced to Joseph that Jesus was the son of the Holy Ghost. In St. Luke, the part of the kings is taken by shepherds who come, not to Joseph's house, but to a stable, and the annunciation is made, not to Joseph but to Mary. Both accounts are full of charm, especially St. Luke's. Yet it is in the highest degree unlikely that both are true. They are obviously variants of a single story.

Nor is the argument from the internal consistency of Jesus's character much stronger. The central figure of St. John's narrative is a very different person from the hero of St. Luke's. The former is an educated, at times sophisticated, mystic whose manner is sharpened by a touch of aristocratic hauteur; the latter is simple and gentle, a man of great charm sweetened by a suspicion of sentimentality. Even within the confines of a single narrative the character varies. St. Matthew's story of Jesus's treatment of the Canaanite woman is, I should say, definitely out of character, as one realises when immediately afterwards one senses Jesus's own

authentic quality in the woman's rebuke, "Truth, Lord; yet the dog seat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table."

I could multiply examples, were it not that the whole issue which they raise is as little to my purpose as it seems integral to yours. Frankly I do not very much mind whether there was Jesus, and whether the Gospels tell the truth about Him or not. What *is* important is the highly original and immensely significant ethical teaching which the Gospels contain, for want of attention to which mankind, as I have already pointed out, seems in a fair way to destroy itself.

Historical experts and palæographic critics will no doubt continue to demonstrate that the New Testament is an agglomeration of different doctrines culled from a varied assortment of contemporary cults, and continue to separate pre-Christian traditions from later accretions; and they will no doubt be answered in kind by their kind. But a mode of treatment which can find in the New Testament nothing but material for such discussions as whether the Sermon on the Mount is authentic or interpolated, whether St. Paul could or could not have written the panegyric on charity attributed to him, or whether, to bring the matter nearer home, Jesus was or was not born of a Virgin, and did or did not visibly ascend into heaven, seems to me to miss the whole point of the Gospels, which is whether the teaching which is called Jesus's, and which I am quite ready to believe is Jesus's, offers a reasonable way of life for twentieth-century mankind, and whether, if it does, twentieth-century mankind can by any manner of means be made to attend to it.

I hope, therefore, that you will see your way to refrain from dragging me too deeply through the controversial mire in regard to what are essentially irrelevant matters of fact.

Yours ever,

CYRIL JOAD.

## XXIX.

2, ALBANY COURTYARD,  
PICCADILLY,  
LONDON, W.1.

26th September, 1932.

DEAR JOAD,

I did not take my views on the sexual life of Russia from the British but from the Russian press. Here is an extract from the official Bolshevik paper, *Pravda*:

"Our young people have certain principles in affairs of love. All these principles are governed by the belief that the nearer you approach to extreme and, as it were, animal primitiveness, the more communistic you are. Every 'Komsomolets,' even every member of a labour faculty, whose aim is to raise the intelligence of the working classes, every student, man or girl, considers it as axiomatic that in affairs of love they should impose the least possible restraint on themselves. A second main proposition in these axioms of love is as follows: 'Every "Komsomolets," every "Rab-faka," every woman student, on whom the choice of one of these young men of strong principles has fallen, must obey unquestioningly.' The third point of the system, which, in practice, is always at the same time a drama, is also a principle. The figure of the doctor appears . . . this is the revolution of 'Komsomolets love'!"

I acknowledge with thanks your concession that the Gospels were written by eye-witnesses. This admission is qualified by your usual attitude of radical scepticism which you assume when confronted with unwelcome evidence. You repeat vague references to the conflict of experts which was your last line of defence when challenged to substantiate some very odd remarks about the Middle Ages. I do not share your scepticism of the possibility of arriving at truth on a point where experts disagree. In poison trials expert witnesses frequently contradict each other, but none the less such trials often result in verdicts which nobody would dispute. The views of "expert palæographers" do not play, as



you seem to think, an important rôle in fixing the dates of the Gospels. This problem is not one for handwriting but for historical experts. The argument for the traditional date is based on admitted facts, such as, for instance, the fact that Justin Martyr, who wrote his *Apology* in A.D. 150, quotes frequently from all four Gospels, which had clearly been accepted by the churches at that date. It would take, as you will yourself admit, far more than fifty years for such documents to be accepted as genuine by a Church which has always been suspicious of innovation.

Nor is it true to suggest that experts never convince each other. The whole history of New Testament criticism is the history of gradual conversion of radical critics to the traditional view.

The argument for the traditional dates, which you quote, based on the note of expectancy with regard to the Second Coming, is strong, but there is no evidence that Jesus "positively promised during the lifetime of his contemporaries." On the contrary, he obviously refuses to give any date for the Second Coming. Owing to the limits of space I must content myself with registering disagreement from you on this point.

Your remarks about the "boring sterility" of the higher criticism controversy display a lack of judgment as to significant values. No problem is more pregnant with tremendous issues than the problem over which this particular controversy raged. Did God become Incarnate in the person of Jesus of Nazareth? How can you possibly compare this tremendous question with the utterly insignificant problem of the authorship of Shakespeare's plays?

There may be discrepancies in the Gospels which are difficult to reconcile, but if there were no such apparent discrepancies you would be the first to insist that the evangelists had copied from the same source, and that the four-fold testimony was therefore reduced to that of a single witness. "The usual characteristic of human testimony," writes Paley, "is substantial truth under circumstantial variety. That is what the daily experience of courts of justice teaches us." And Paley mentions the fact that whereas Clarendon tells us that the Marquis of Argyll was condemned

and hanged on the Tuesday, other contemporary historians assure us that he was condemned on the Saturday and beheaded, not hanged, on a Tuesday. Yet nobody would deny the fact that his execution took place.

Your examples of discrepancies are quaint, and as an example of "two inconsistent accounts of the same incident" you quote the two stories of the visit of the Magi and the visit of the shepherds, saying that these are "obviously variants of a single story." The words "obviously" and "palpably" in your letters are useful signposts to warn the traveller that you are leaving the country of truth for the fairyland of romantic conjecture. And while we are wandering in the land of conjecture let me take a leaf from your book and remind you of the "obvious" and "palpable" truth of the Christian tradition which has always maintained that the visit of the Magi and the visit of the shepherds symbolise the two classes of men who find the truth, the highly educated and the very simple. It is the half-educated who are in danger of remaining deaf to the angelic voices and blind to the guiding star.

Clearly it is obvious that if Christ was born of a Virgin the angel of the Lord would appear both to Joseph and to the Virgin Mary; to the Blessed Virgin to prepare her for the high honour which was to be hers, and to Joseph to reassure him of the spotless chastity of the woman who was "with child before they came together." If only you could apply that "common sense" to which you appeal in your own criticisms of gospel narratives, you might remember that the intrusion of the supernatural does not necessarily involve the disappearance of ordinary human motives.

It is odd that you should mention Robinson Crusoe without realising that you are emphasising the very point which I made. The verisimilitude of this classic is due, you say, "to the consummate literary artistry of Defoe." Precisely. A high degree of verisimilitude is achieved either by consummate artistry or by a simple narrative of the true facts. You will agree with me that the four evangelists were not consummate literary artists, and the remaining alternative is that they told the truth. Actually, as Leslie Stephen has pointed out, "the praise which had been lavished upon

Defoe for the verisimilitude of his novels seems rather extravagant."

If the Gospels are fiction, the Evangelists were greater artists than Defoe.

Our discussion of miracles would be facilitated if you would avoid the *petitio principii*. A flagrant example of this logical crime is your claim to reject those portions of the Gospels which conflict with common sense or which are "incongruous or inherently unlikely." Common sense teaches us that the sun goes round the earth, that the earth is flat, and that we see the stars as they are to-day, not as they were hundreds or thousands of years ago. I need not remind you of the contradiction between the common-sense ideas of space and time and the views, which may or may not be untrue, of modern physics.

Your notions of common sense lead you to reject the miracles; mine to accept them. We are, therefore, both estopped from appealing to common sense, for there is no agreed objective standard of common sense.

We both accept the idea of deity. I contend that it is inherently unlikely that God would refuse to deny his creatures a revelation, and that it is inherently probable that such a revelation would take the form of some modification of natural law. I see no reason to believe that the physical universe is a closed system, or to deny that the free-will of God might interfere, as the free-will of man interferes, with the mechanical sequence of cause and effect. When you catch an apple falling from a tree you are modifying, by the exercise of free-will, the effect of natural law. I see nothing inherently improbable in the assumption that God may similarly modify his laws, particularly as God is the lawgiver to whom those laws owe their existence.

I am entitled to my views, and you are entitled to yours, but just as I am forbidden by the laws of logic to support my argument for the Resurrection by an appeal to the "inherent probability" of divine miracles, you are forbidden by those same laws to support your objections to the Resurrection by the assertion that miracles are "inherently improbable."

The occurrence and probability of miracles is the question

## CHRIST'S ETHICAL TEACHING

which we are debating, and we must both confine ourselves to arguments based on historical evidence and not introduce our own *a priori* prejudices under the blissful impression that a prejudice is the same thing as a proof.

Nor can I permit you to assume that any text which you dislike has been "interpolated." You have got to prove interpolation either by showing that the text in question is not found in an earlier document, or that it differs in linguistic style from the rest of the manuscript, or that it implies knowledge of events later in date than the accepted date of authorship. Proof is what I require from you, my dear Joad. You are not lecturing to emotional moderns; you are debating with a hard-baked rationalist who takes nothing on trust.

I am amused by your lordly attempt to dismiss the resurrection as unimportant compared with "the highly original and immensely significant ethical teaching" of the Gospels. The message which thrilled the first century was not, as Father Knox has remarked, "love your enemies," but "He is risen!"

Your tribute to Christ's "highly original and immensely significant ethical teaching" would, as I have already remarked, be more impressive if you had not attacked, with such persistent vehemence, Christ's teaching on the subject of eternal punishment, on sex, on the conscience, which you describe as "a formidable moral apparatus," on the supreme importance of the next world, on the comparative unimportance of this world, on the divine value of suffering and on the fatherhood of God, a God not remote like your deity, but actively interested in every human soul. I agree with you that "for want of attention to his message mankind is in a fair way to destroy itself." I only wish that you were equally convinced of the truth of this fact.

I am glad that you do at least recognise that Christ's ethical teaching is unique. One can parallel certain of his sayings with the sayings of other religious teachers. Doctrines, like men, are both called and chosen, but the unique nature of Christ's teaching, taken as a whole, is beyond dispute. And it is not only the teaching that is unique.

Neither Moses nor Mohammed nor Confucius nor Buddha,

nor even Mrs. Eddy, claimed to be God. With the solitary exception of Jesus Christ, every prophet and religious leader has claimed to speak as the *representative* of God or of divine wisdom. Jesus alone claimed to *be* God.

And yet this tremendous claim more than half convinces those who, like you, formally reject it. Subconsciously, at least, you hear the ring of truth in the words of one who spoke as no man has ever spoken. Christ was either God or a deluded megalomaniac. You content yourself with a mild criticism of his "aristocratic hauteur." A touch of "hauteur" seems unavoidable in one who claims to be infinitely above all created beings. Even a democrat might forgive the aristocracy of one who could say, "Before Abraham I was."

In Christ, indeed, we find a combination of infinite humility and infinite hauteur. "Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet."

If we treat, as we must for the purpose of this debate, the Gospels as purely human documents, it is clear that we must distinguish between those parts of the Gospels which profess to be the records of eye-witnesses and those parts which are based on hearsay evidence. Humanly speaking, the evidence for the Resurrection is, in the nature of things, infinitely stronger than the evidence for the Virgin Birth. I shall not, therefore, trouble you with my own reasons for accepting the Virgin Birth, for my first duty is to prove the Resurrection. I shall, therefore, content myself with remarking that there is nothing surprising in St. Paul's references to Jesus as "the son of Joseph," for legally Jesus was the son of Joseph, and is referred to as such by the Evangelists who record the Virgin Birth. The fullest record of the Virgin Birth is given by St. Luke, St. Paul's constant travelling companion, so that the suggestion that St. Paul knew nothing about it is frankly incredible. I have no space to discuss your suggestion that the whole story was a "palpable interpolation . . . an obvious leaf taken out of the book of the Roman Emperors," the Magnificat being presumably an adaption from the *Odes* of Horace. I know what to expect when my old friends "palpable" and "interpolation" appear in your letters.

## CHRIST'S MIRACLES

I expect that you will soon regret your admission that the Gospels are in the main the work of eye-witnesses. Strauss was clear-headed enough to realise that if this admission was once made, it was impossible to eliminate the miraculous from the Gospels. If they were to be regarded as *Wirklich geschichtliche Urkunden*, miracles could not be explained away. He exposed to some very keen criticism the attempts of his predecessors to write non-historical lives of Jesus on the assumption that the Gospels were the work of honest but credulous eye-witnesses.

Consider, for instance, *The Acts*. Of the historical accuracy of the travel document, Sir William Ramsay is a convincing because a converted witness. A certain Mr. Smith, of Jordan Hill, sailed over the course of St. Paul's voyage, and by "a number of minute coincidences verified the accuracy of St. Luke's narrative." I know of no sane canon of criticism which enables us to accept St. Luke as an amazingly accurate historian of secular facts and a credulous and glaringly inaccurate observer of alleged supernatural events. Only by assuming that miracles are "inherently improbable" can we refuse credence to St. Paul's miracles on the Island of Melitus.

If you ever read the apocryphal gospels, you will be impressed by the "obvious and palpable"—to use your favourite words—unverisimilitude of the miracles attributed to Jesus. Instinctively one realises that the stories have been invented. No touch suggests the eye-witness; we are in the land of magic unashamed. Now re-read the Gospels and note how the miraculous element is woven into the very texture of moving human stories, stories which suggest the eye-witness. The Jesus of the Gospels is not a mere wonder-worker, a magician. Christ's miracles were "incidental, and issued from a pity that knew that it had power to heal men's sickness and to supply their physical needs, and could not refrain from using it. But they were rather concealed than advertised" (Bishop Gore). Note how often these miracles give occasion, as Bishop Gore points out, for sayings and gestures of Christ which bear the unmistakable touch of authenticity. "Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" Surely you hear the

authentic voice of Jesus in those words, and if you can, how can you refuse credence to the setting of these words, the man with a withered hand which was healed?

You are ready enough to assume that the Evangelists were accurate reporters of the spoken word when the spoken words fit in with your preconceived prejudices, particularly in the case of texts which provide you with a stick with which to beat Christians—*e.g.*, when you are anxious to prove how singularly they have failed to practise the creed Christ taught. On the other hand, you dismiss as an interpolation any text which conflicts with your preconceived views.

“Nothing is more difficult,” I wrote the other day to Professor Haldane, “than to report conversation accurately. Indeed, Boswell is one of the few people in history who have reported with accuracy the *ipsissima verba* of his hero. In a police court a witness who was accepted as a reliable witness of a conversation would certainly be believed if he reported some striking incident. It is therefore difficult to understand why the hostile critics of the Gospels assume that the Evangelists were more accurate than Boswell when they report words which the Christian may find some slight difficulty in explaining, and less accurate than an hysterical girl frightened by a ghost when they report incidents which the rationalist is anxious to explain away.”

And now we come to the greatest of all historical problems, the problem of the first Easter Sunday. Let us begin with St. Mark’s account of what took place in the Garden of Gethsemane.

St. Mark’s is the oldest of Christian documents. It was inspired by St. Peter and bears the imprint of his rugged honesty. No attempt is made to represent St. Peter in a favourable light. No hint of extenuating circumstances is put forward to mitigate his failures. The betrayal is recorded with bleak objectivity. St. Mark, St. Peter’s close friend and associate, gives without comment Christ’s tremendous rebuke to St. Peter: “Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God.” That this rebuke should be recorded in a document written by St. Peter’s friend, and intended for the official use of the Christian

churches, is difficult to explain on any hypothesis other than the fact that St. Mark recorded the stark, unpalatable truth.

St. Mark describes the failure of the disciples in Gethsemane. Twice they fell asleep when they should have been keeping watch; their nerve finally gave way after the arrest of their leader, "and they all forsook him and fled."

Not the sort of thing that the Evangelists would be expected to invent. "If evidence were needed," as Mr. Morrison remarks, "of the high standard of veracity prevailing in the Early Church, we have it here in its most convincing form."

Seven weeks later we find these timid, broken men risking imprisonment, persecution and death in the name of one whom they had forsaken in despair. How can we explain this psychological revolution?

There is only one explanation which fits the facts—the explanation given by St. Peter: "This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we are all witnesses."

What is your explanation of the records of Christ's appearance after the crucifixion? Hallucination?

People who mistake a polysyllabic and quasi-scientific phrase for an explanation may perhaps accept "collective hallucination" as the clue to this problem. But the scientist will ask whether there is any objective evidence of collective hallucination on this scale. Alienists, who should know, are sceptical on this subject. Normal people under abnormal conditions and abnormal people under normal conditions suffer from isolated hallucinations, but there is no record in science of normal people, not once but several times, and not under abnormal but under normal conditions, being collectively affected by the same persistent hallucinations.

I can speak with some personal experience on this point. Many years ago a friend and I devoted a long and dreadful day to the exploration of a Pyrenean peak on which a fellow-mountaineer had been killed. We were very tired, for we had left London at short notice, and had started our search the night of our arrival in the Pyrenees. Every time we turned a corner we expected to find our friend. Before long we began to see and to hear things; to see his body stretched out on the rocks, and to hear other members of the



party shouting that they had found him. A vulture hovering near the cliff, as vultures will hover for days before attacking a dead body, provided a macabre touch which reinforced the illusion. These hallucinations were amazingly vivid while they lasted, but they never lasted for more than a second or two before reality broke in. Do you know of any cases in which hallucinations affecting normal people have lasted for hours at a time?

Now in the case of Christ's appearances to the apostles, there was no background of exhaustion, strain or terror. After a hard day's work in the open air the disciples meet together for the evening meal, and Christ appears among them. The "hallucination" breaks bread, eats a bit of broiled fish and distributes the remains among them. An odd kind of "hallucination."

Again, do you know of any case of a sane man being gradually hallucinated against the steady resistance of a strong negative conviction? My patron saint, St. Thomas, insisted on experimental proof before he would believe; he yielded gradually to the evidence of stubborn fact.

It was the appearance of Christ which transformed the apostles; no other explanation is adequate to explain the transformation of these men from a broken and dispirited group into the triumphant missionaries who returned to Jerusalem. Jerusalem, mark you! Had their faith been corroded by the least suspicion that the appearances of Christ were not objective, they would certainly have elected to preach the Gospel in the comparative seclusion of Galilee; they would never have dared to return to Jerusalem, the headquarters of the powerful party which had engineered the crucifixion and of the Roman procurator who sent Christ to the Cross. They knew that imprisonment and death awaited them, and yet these men who had fled at the approach of danger launched their crusade in the very stronghold of the enemy. There is a mistaken impression that our ancestors objected less than we do to death and to pain. Subconsciously we are inclined to believe that the apostles and martyrs were men who did not understand the meaning of fear. But St. Mark makes it clear that the disciples were not naturally heroic men; their conduct in Gethsemane was,

on the contrary, base and cowardly. Nothing but a conviction, overpowering in its force, nothing but a conviction coercive in its evidence of objective reality, could have wrought this amazing transformation. "Somehow the rugged fisherman Peter," writes Mr. Morrison in that excellent book *Who Moved the Stone?* "and his brother Andrew, the characteristically doubting Thomas, the seasoned and not too sensitive tax-gatherer, Matthew, the rather dull Philip, intensely loyal but a little slow of apprehension, do not fit easily into the conditions required for an absolutely unshakable, collective hallucination. And if it is not both collective and unshakable, it is of no use to us. The terrors and the persecutions which these men ultimately had to face, and did face unflinchingly, do not admit of a half-hearted adhesion secretly honeycombed with doubt. The belief has to be unconditional and of adamant strength to satisfy the conditions. Sooner or later, too, if the belief was to spread, it had to bite its way into the corporate consciousness by convincing argument and attempted proof."

The heterogeneous collection of Galilean peasants invaded Jerusalem, "the most keenly intellectual centre of Judea," and pitted their faith against "the ablest dialecticians of the day, and in the face of every impediment which a brilliant and highly organised camarilla could devise." *And they won.* Within twenty years they had threatened the peace of the Roman Empire.

Mr. Morrison, I might remark, began as an agnostic with a great knowledge of Jewish history and of the Jewish background. He sat down before the problem of the Resurrection and determined to find a naturalistic solution. He was beaten in his attempt, and forced back after prolonged study on the fact that Christ rose again from the dead, the only possible solution which he could accept without doing violence to intellectual honesty. You should read his book.

It is always tempting to take the past for granted, but when we think of the triumph of Christianity we must remember the contempt which the Romans felt for the Jew, and the disdain with which an educated Roman would sweep aside the grotesque creed which had discovered God in a common

criminal executed by a Roman procurator. Do you remember Anatole France's story?

"'Je ris,' dit Lamia, 'd'une idée plaisante qui, je ne sais comment, m'a traversée la tête. Je songeais qu'un jour le Jupiter des Juifs pourrait venir à Rome. Crains Pontius que le Jupiter invisible des Juifs ne débarque un jour à Ostie.' A l'idée qu'un dieu pouvait venir de Judée un rapide sourire glissa sur le visage sévère du procureur."

If the disciples of a Mahdi, executed by a British Court Martial, believed that he had risen from the dead and succeeded in converting the British Empire to their creed, if the new gospel was preached in St. Paul's, and if strange African ceremonies replaced High Mass at Westminster Cathedral—if some such religious cataclysm as this took place, it would be no more amazing than the capture of Rome by the disciples of the Galilean. "We cannot," as Mr. Morrison remarks, "insist upon the strict reign of causality in the physical world, and deny it in the psychological. The phenomenon which here confronts us is one of the biggest dislodgments of events in the world's history, and it can only really be accounted for by an initial impact of colossal drive and power."

Even if you attribute the transformation of the disciples to a subjective illusion, you have still to explain the objective fact that the tomb was empty on Easter Sunday.

In the most primitive accounts of the trial there is, as Mr. Morrison points out, the assertion that the whole case against Jesus turned upon a sentence containing the words "in three days." There is every reason to believe that the Priests should, as St. Matthew tells us, take precautions against the disciples faking a resurrection by stealing the body from the tomb. And there is every reason to accept the recorded fact that the Priests sealed the sepulchre and placed a guard.

How did the body of Jesus escape from the tomb? The theory that Jesus did not die on the cross and recovered in the tomb still leaves unexplained his exit from a closely guarded sepulchre. And it is impossible, as Strauss points out, that a man crippled by that terrible ordeal, even if he could have survived at all, could "have given to the disciples the impression that he was a conqueror over death and the grave,

## THE EMPTY TOMB

the Prince of Life; an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry."

Even more grotesque is the suggestion that Joseph of Arimathea removed the body. No motive has ever been suggested for such an action, and once again you are faced by the difficulty of evading the guard and by the further difficulty that the new tomb of Jesus would probably have become a shrine, and would certainly have killed stone dead the story of the Resurrection.

The disciples returned to Jerusalem and preached the Resurrection. Clearly if the tomb had not been empty, the Priests would have triumphantly produced the body. And it was only because the disciples knew that no writ of *habeas corpus* could be served on one who had ascended into Heaven that they were able to prosecute their campaign with complete confidence and triumphant success.

In all the literature of the period there is no suggestion that the emptiness of the tomb was disputed. The only controversy which is recorded turns on the question as to whether the disciples had stolen the body. The vacancy of the tomb was common ground to the Christians and to their enemies.

I await your explanation of one of the best attested facts in history.

Yours ever,  
ARNOLD LUNN.

XXX.

4, EAST HEATH ROAD,  
N.W. 3.  
7th October.

MY DEAR LUNN,

I.—Why do you say that Jesus did not promise a Second Coming during the lifetime of his contemporaries? I have just looked up the passage and find (Mark xiii., verse 26): "And then shall they see the son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory," and (verse 30): "Verily I say unto you that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done." Suspecting that you and I may be too far gone in the ways of the intellect to recognise a plain promise when we meet one, I asked a plain person whether the second verse constituted a promise or no. He said unhesitatingly that it did. I suggest that you either concede the point or take refuge in an "interpolation."

I must now enter a protest against your choice of subjects for discussion. You consider at some length the question of the Resurrection, and only spare me your reasons "for accepting the Virgin Birth" because the Resurrection is for you crucial. I dissent altogether from your scale of values.

Jesus, we are both agreed, propounds doctrines of immense ethical importance. "Why, then," you ask, "don't you attend to them?" I have already pointed out that no civilisation has yet dreamed of conducting its affairs for five minutes on the assumption that any of the things Jesus said were true. Well, I am a child of my civilisation, a typical member of contemporary un-Christian society, and it seems a little hard to expect me to disprove my own generalisation in my own person. Why should I be an exception to the prevailing refusal to take Christ seriously? After all—you must pardon the personal question—are you? You fight with the rest when a war is on, and in my hearing have professed political sentiments of a kind which, while doing credit to your patriotism, do none to the influence of Christ. As one who insists on the duty of resisting violence with violence and believes in the

## POWER OF CHRIST'S TEACHING

right of the sword to settle disputes, you are as bad an advertisement for Christ's teaching as you are a good illustration of my generalisation. Why, then, I should like in passing to know, do *you* attack "Christ's teaching" with "the persistent vehemence" of your most cherished political convictions?

But however steadfastly we may both disregard it in practice, we both acknowledge the tremendous impression which this teaching has made on us, and what puzzles me is how, while officially under the influence of that impression, you can bring yourself to waste your and my time over vulgar marvels like virgin births and risen bodies, the stock common-places of primitive cults the world over. Consider, for a moment, the implications of your attitude. In your first letter you chid me for my impatience with disputes over the Virgin Birth, and quoted a passage from my *Present and Future of Religion*, in which I expose the triviality of the issues involved. Conceive us, I said, visited by a traveller of immense wisdom and insight, whose teaching contains the secret of conduct and is, in fact, a guide to the good life; before his death he establishes an official caste to be the repositories of his teaching and the living advertisements of his way of life. A distracted generation which has lost its way in difficult times applies to them for guidance and an interpretation of his teaching, only to be regaled with disputes over the particular route by which the sage chose to travel. The disputants are particularly intrigued by the question of whether he selected a natural or a supernatural vehicle!

You failed to understand the point then, and I don't suppose you will understand it now. But Christ understood it well enough. Throughout his career he continually rebukes those who ask him to display miraculous powers. Why? Because, as he clearly saw, they are completely irrelevant to the issues that he wished to raise, and the inevitable effect of the display would be to divert attention from his real purpose. Jesus's teaching has nothing to do with miracles, nor, until towards the close of his career, when a chance remark of Peter's, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God," puts the idea of divine origin into his head, with the supernatural. And the point, the point that Jesus saw and

you apparently do not, is that not a single one of his didactic utterances would be invalidated if he never wrought a miracle, came into the world by normal processes, and left it on the cross for good and all, or proved, if he wrought a thousand miracles each more wonderful than the last. 'You should do good to those who hate you and love your enemies, and to convince you that what I say is true I will now turn this water into grape juice,' involves, as Jesus saw clearly enough, a complete *non sequitur*. Hence his annoyance with those who, by the insistence of their demands for the miraculous, obscured the purport of his message, an annoyance which goes to the rather startling length of calling his audience an "evil and adulterous generation" merely because they ask him for "a sign."

How entirely justified Jesus's apprehensions were your own letter conclusively demonstrates. For generations the energy of sceptics and theologians has been wasted in arguing about the miracles and the Resurrection, on the assumption that the truth of Christ's teaching is at stake in the controversy as to whether the story that his body rose from the dead is true. And now I find you trying to waste mine over the same issue! "He is risen!" you triumphantly cry, thus echoing the ingenuous exclamation of those who were "thrilled in the first century" into thinking that marvels prove propositions.

Can't you see that this is exactly the attitude that Christ objected to? Mankind is by nature sensation-loving; it loves marvels, and is much more disposed to stand gaping "for a sign" than to reflect upon the implications of an original, ethical doctrine, much readier to accept a marvel than to go to the trouble of effecting that revolution in its conduct which taking the doctrine seriously would involve.

I recently picked up a book by a "Scientist-Fundamentalist," whose object is to show that the Bible is literally true, and that science either supports it, or, when it doesn't, is false. It is the sort of book which was turned out by the dozen in this country in the last century, and still apparently commands a sale in the States. It contains discussions of such questions as whether God really took one of Adam's ribs to make Eve, whether the sun really stood still in the sky when

## CHRIST'S DISLIKE OF HIS OWN MIRACLES

Joshua took Jericho, how long Jonah stayed in the whale's belly, whether "whale" means whale or something else, where Cain got his wife from, and—it having been settled that his wife was his sister—whether his relation with her was incestuous. (The writer concludes that it was not, apparently because it happened so long ago.)

Now I deprecate this importance that you attach to such matters as the mode of Jesus's entry into the world and of his leaving it, if only because it bids fair to relegate our book to the category of disquisitions on "the whale" and Cain's wife, and I protest that in bringing the discussion down to this plane you are smirching with the trail of the séance room the nobility of what, I agree with you, is the profoundest ethical message that the world has known. Can't you possibly be induced to take Christ's teaching seriously, unless you first hitch it on to marvels and miracles, and then persuade yourself to believe them? Apparently you can't, and so, since you will have your discussion, here goes!

II.—As you realise, one cannot satisfactorily discuss the Resurrection without first coming to some decision upon the question of the infallibility of the Gospel stories. Here my position remains as stated in my last letter. Accepting them as probably true in the main, we are far from being bound to accept the gospels in every particular.

I am quite unimpressed by your additional remarks on "the literary value" point.

Your argument is briefly: the gospels are works of consummate literary artistry. There are two possible explanations of this: either they were written by consummate literary artists, or they are the records of plain men telling what they have seen. The first hypothesis is most unlikely; therefore, by process of elimination, one must adopt the second. With a little dialectical ingenuity one can make anything one pleases of considerations of this sort. For example, if you get a plain man to record facts which have come under his notice, the result is very far from being a narrative which anybody would want to read. You can test this for yourself by reading the diary of any private soldier with no literary talents, or a Trade Unionist's account of his visit to Russia. Yet the authors are describing what they



believe to be facts. Ergo, the presumption in the case of a work of literary charm is either (a) that it is written by a person of great literary ability, or (b) that it is not a plain record of fact. You reject (a) in the case of the evangelists; the conclusion, therefore, seems to point to (b).

But the gospels are not by any means always attractive from the literary point of view. They are sometimes dull; sometimes, as I have already pointed out, they offend against the canon of internal consistency, while frequently they are so lacking in verisimilitude that, as you know, even Christian commentators are driven to infer later interpolations. But these considerations are apparently in your view grounds for considering them to be truthful, since, as you yourself have pointed out, plain men do describe facts inaccurately, and, as I have just reminded you, they also describe them tediously. We thus reach the conclusion that the gospels are the records of eye-witnesses for precisely the opposite reason to that for which you assert them to be so. And so on. . . .

The only fair inference seems to be that, since this sort of argument can be used to suggest any conclusion, it proves none.

Again, your explanation of the inconsistent accounts of the same incidents is very unconvincing. The gospels, I point out, give contradictory accounts of what is apparently the same incident; you concede the point and remark, following Paley, that only shows how true they are. Are all the contradictory accounts, then, true, or only one? And, if so, which one? And how do you know which one?

The point is important because, if one must swallow the gospels whole, clearly one ought to accept the Resurrection. I am not clear whether you think one must or not. If you don't, what is the relevance of your invocation of the "clear-headed Strauss's" admission that, if the gospels are conceded to be in the main the work of eye-witnesses, then one cannot eliminate the miraculous? Obviously one cannot, if by conceding the eye-witness authorship, one is committed to swallowing whole, but *only on that assumption*. If you do, what do you make of the contradictory accounts? Or do you propose to invoke the miraculous to suspend the law of contradiction? Rather a prodigal use to make of it!

Again, you are becoming an adept at "having it both ways." Do the gospel stories contain the sort of incidents you would expect the writers to put in? They do! Good; they must be accepted. Do they contain the sort of incidents you would expect the writers to leave out—for example, the falling asleep and the failure of nerve in Gethsemane? They do. Better still. "Not the sort of thing the Evangelists would be expected to invent," you comment, and conclude again that they must be accepted. On this basis any and everything could be shown to strengthen the claim to acceptance not only of the gospels taken as a whole, but of every single incident recorded in them. I am sorry, but I remain unconvinced, and reiterate my resolve to accept or reject in the light of common sense and inherent probability.

But what, you ask, is "common sensical," what is inherently probable? and answer, apparently, "The Resurrection." And so at last, and having registered my protest, I come to what you insist on regarding as the crux of your argument.

III.—I see no alternative to going through the last part of your letter and dealing with detailed points as they arise. What follows is bound, therefore, to be scrappy and may be boring; but it shall also be brief.

*St. Mark.*—St. Mark's is not "the oldest of Christian documents," as any school-boy knows. The Epistles, Romans, Corinthians I. and II., and Galatians were all written about A.D. 58, Philipians A.D. 62-3, and Thessalonians A.D. 53-4. Certainly Mark's is thought by most people to be the oldest of the *gospels*; its date at the earliest is A.D. 67-70. One contemporary critic (Robinson Smith) puts it as late as A.D. 105. The point is important as a symbol rather than in substance; it symbolises the looseness of statement which characterises all this part of your letter.

"It was inspired by St. Peter." This is an opinion masquerading as a fact. The *Encyclopædia Biblica* thinks it "possible."

On the question of the reliability of Mark's narrative here is a Conybeare for a Morrison! Accepting the historicity of Christ, F. C. Conybeare writes in *Myth, Magic and Morals*, pp. 57-58: "Mark's gospel is not an original document, but one compiled from earlier sources. . . . Mark,

the main source of the first and third evangelists, is himself no original writer, but a compiler who pieces together and edits earlier documents in which his predecessors had written down popular traditions of the miracles and passion of Jesus." And on page 139, "There is not enough material for writing a life of Jesus."

St. Mark, you say, "describes the failure of the disciples in Gethsemane," as though that failure can be accepted without cavil as a historical incident. But can it? Mark also says that Jesus prayed while his disciples slept (xiv 35-41), and proceeds to give the exact words (verse 36) of a prayer which nobody heard, except perhaps God. Is the prayer authentic? If so, how did it come to be known to Mark? And does a narrative ring true which in verse 41 reports Jesus as saying to his disciples, "Sleep on now, and take your rest . . .," and in the very next verse, 42, "Rise up, let us go . . .?"

*Collective Hallucinations.*—Your argument is confused because you fail to distinguish properly between two possibilities: either (a) the record may be reliable, but be a record of a collective hallucination, or (b) it may be unreliable.

You rightly dismiss the hallucination hypothesis as absurd, but entirely overlook the possibility of (b). Allow me, therefore, to quote a passage from *Modern Rationalism* by J. McCabe (pp. 101-102), which by analogy throws an interesting light on this possibility:

"In the year 1844 Persia was startled by a young and fervent preacher, Ali Mohammed, or 'The Bab,' who announced that he had a mission from the Almighty. He sought to purify the prevailing religion, as Christ did, and within a few years was executed by the authorities, as Christ is said to have been. A narrative of his life was written shortly afterwards, and merely depicted a fine human character. But within forty years another biography of the Bab was received among his followers, and it vied with the gospels in stories of miracle! To complete the parallel, I may add that the religion of the slain prophet (now known as Bahaism) is spreading over the world and services are held by its followers in London and New York. A more illuminating parallel it would be difficult to conceive."

## EVIDENCE (?) FOR THE RESURRECTION

Note that St. Mark's Gospel was written at least forty years after the date given for Jesus's execution, just as the Bab's miraculous biography was published forty years after the Bab's death.

*The Resurrection Story and Afterwards.*—There are the usual contradictions. Mark says "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome" go to the tomb of Christ and find that "the stone was rolled away." He concludes by telling us that the women went away, "neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid." Waiving the difficulty of understanding how, if the only eye-witnesses failed to tell anyone what they had seen, Mark came to hear of it, let us turn to the other evangelists. Matthew forgets that Salome went to the tomb; but adds that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary met Jesus as they went *from* the tomb. Unfortunately he says that the two women "did run to bring his disciples word." Luke alleges that there were *two* men "in shining garments" in the tomb; and that, after Peter had been informed of this, he ran to the sepulchre and saw the linen clothes. Now surely Peter's "close friend" Mark ought to have included these details in his account, especially as Eusebius quotes Papias as saying that Mark was careful "to omit none of the things that he heard" from Peter. Luke, however, is equally careless, for he omits the meeting of Jesus and the two Maries.

In your comments upon the story of Jesus' appearance to break bread and eat fish among the apostles, you have again succeeded in surprising me. "There was," you say, "no background of exhaustion, strain or terror." What! Not after the crucifixion and death of Jesus, earthquakes, the splitting of the veil, hours of darkness, and, worst of all, the graves opening so that the bodies of peripatetic saints appeared unto many! Moreover, Luke himself says (xxiv 37) that, when Jesus appeared, "they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit."

But need we in any event take the narratives seriously? Jesus appears in the garden, at Emmaus, at Jerusalem, and ascends at Bethany. At Jerusalem he tells the disciples (Luke xxiv 49) to tarry there "until ye be endued with power from on high." Why, then, in view of this instruction, is it recorded

in two Gospels, Mark and Matthew, that an angel told the disciples to go and meet Jesus in Galilee? Luke says the eleven met in Jerusalem (xxiv 33); Matthew sends the eleven into Galilee (xxviii 16). The *Encyclopedia Biblica* comments: "If the disciples had seen Jesus in Jerusalem as Luke states, it would be absolutely incomprehensible how Mark and Matthew came to require them to repair to Galilee before they could receive a manifestation of Jesus." Thus the *Biblica* saves Matthew and Mark by making Luke's account erroneous.

#### EFFECTS OF RESURRECTION UPON CONTEMPORARIES

(i) *Heroism of Early Christians*.—This, you say, is only explicable on the assumption that Christ reappeared to them. What, then, are we to say of the equal heroism of later Christians who had no direct contact with the risen Christ?

(ii) *Effect on Jerusalem*.—A little odd, isn't it, that the mass of the population should remain so completely unconvinced by the signs and wonders that the disciples found so completely convincing? For three years Jesus went about performing the most wonderful deeds, and at his death the heavens and the earth demonstrated: "And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many" (Matthew xxvii 52, 53). That should have been enough to convert Jerusalem, at least! Odd that it wasn't!

(iii) *Belief and Fact*.—What is presupposed on your own showing by the subsequent confidence of the apostles is not that Christ should have risen, but that they should have believed him to have risen. This view is supported by the following quotations from Christian sources: Baur, *Church History*, vol. i, p. 42:—"What history requires as the necessary antecedent of all that is to follow is not so much the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus as the belief that it was a fact." *Encyclopedia Biblica*, Article on "Resurrection":—"It is undeniable that the Church was founded, not directly upon the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus, but upon the belief in his Resurrection; and this faith worked with equal power whether the Resurrection was an actual fact or not."

(iv) *Effect upon Rome*.—"Within twenty years they had threatened the peace of the Roman Empire." I suppose that this veiled reference is to a passage in Suetonius, who, somewhere between A.D. 120 and 130, wrote that "Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because, at the instigation of Chrestos, they were always making trouble." If you mean this passage, why don't you say so? If you have some other authority in mind, who is it?

(v) *Morrison* is an agnostic turned Christian through reading the New Testament. How many Christians have been turned agnostic by performing the same office?

(vi) *Mahdi*. The analogy of the Mahdi is inexact. To make it exact we should have to imagine a Mahdi (or rather the cult of a Mahdi) who fulfilled a need among the lower orders of the British Empire. We should also have to imagine the cult of the Mahdi struggling for centuries to obtain a leadership among rival and similar faiths (it is doubtful whether there were many more than a million Christians in A.D. 300); and we should have to imagine a Mahdism so pliable that, instead of strange African ceremonies taking the place of High Mass at Westminster Cathedral, as you suggest, almost precisely the same ritual would continue to be performed under a new terminology and in honour of a new God.

We have never had time to go into the question of Christianity's debts to and parallels with other religions. In support, however, of my own amendments to your Mahdi analogy I quote from J. M. Robertson's *A Short History of Christianity*, p. 55: "When . . . the Christian cult became that of the State, it of necessity reverted to the psychology of the multitude, and carried the use of images as far as pagans had ever done. . . . Before the period of image-worship, too, the Church had fully accepted the compromise by which countless pagan 'heroes' and 'geniuses,' the subject of local cults, became enrolled as saints and martyrs. . . . Above all, there was finally forced on the Church a cult of the Mother as Virgin Goddess, without which it could not have held its own against the great popular worships of Isis and Rhea-Cybelê and Dêmêtêr. . . . If the original Jesus of the myth had not had a mythical mother, it would have been necessary to invent one. Once established, her elevation to the honours of Isis was inevitable."

The phrase in which you reach the climax of your letter and with which you bring it to a close, "one of the best attested facts in history," seems to be a simple "bloomer." I am no more of a scholar or a historian than you are, and, therefore, no more competent to express an opinion upon the mass of evidence which must be sifted and assessed by those who seek to pronounce upon the historicity of the Resurrection. What I can do is to go to Christian authorities, Christian because they cannot be accused of bias against the Resurrection, and see what they say. I go, accordingly, and bring back for your instruction four quotations:

Dr. Percy Gardner, *Exploratio Evangelica*, p. 255: "The tale of the physical resurrection of Jesus belongs evidently to the same circle of thought as that of the miraculous birth. This tale likewise rests on a historical substruction which falls to pieces on a careful examination."

Prof. Kirsopp Lake, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 181: "It is practically certain that the story of the guard at the tomb had no place in the earliest traditions as to the burial, is unhistorical, and need not be further taken into account in considering the evidence for the Resurrection of the Lord." *Ibid.*, p. 253: "The empty tomb is for us doctrinally indefensible and is historically insufficiently accredited."

Rev. J. M. Thompson, *Miracles in the New Testament*, p. 181: "The story (of the guard) is, in fact, a later evidential addition, to meet the theory that the disciples stole the body and simulated a resurrection."

And finally *Encyclopedia Biblica*, article on "Resurrection": "For the most authentic information on the subject of the resurrection of Jesus we naturally look to the Gospels; these, however, exhibit contradictions of the most glaring kind."

Now, who am I that I should prefer Mr. Morrison to Dr. Gardner, Professor Kirsopp Lake, the Rev. J. M. Thompson and the author of an article in the *Encyclopedia Biblica*? And what credentials have you in the light of such a weight of authority to seek to impose upon me and upon our readers "one of the best attested facts in history"?

Yours sincerely,  
CYRIL JOAD.

XXXI.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY.  
*October 11th.*

MY DEAR JOAD,

I.—I have just been calculating the margin which still remains if we are to keep within the limits imposed by the publisher. I do not complain that your "half" of the book is more than two-thirds, for it was important that you should not be cramped in your statement of the case against Christianity, but you must not complain if I have to deal in rather a sketchy manner with some of your points. I should, for instance, enjoy nothing better than to discuss at length the absurdities of the criticism based on comparative religion, or the heresy that war is always and inevitably unchristian. But space is the difficulty, and, this being so, is it really fair that you should drag up again the very silly analogy about the Virgin Birth, which you lifted from another writer in the first place and which was fully disposed of on pages 8-9, which kindly see?

Just one small point about war. Christ did not state that violence was always wrong, or he would not have himself set the example of using violence to clear the Temple. Christ could not have meant to suggest that it would be wrong for you to resist, with violence if necessary, the attempt of a criminal to burgle your house or to rape your daughter. The police force, which you must admit to be necessary, is based on the principle that crime must be resisted and that violence may be met with violence. And an army, in so far as it is only used in a *just* war as a national police, is not an institution of which Christ would have disapproved. Can you quote a single text to suggest that he regarded the military profession as unlawful, or that he disapproved of soldiers doing their duty? "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." The State has the right to call upon the citizen to defend his country, and it is the duty of the citizen to render unto the State the service which the



State has the right to demand. Read Stratmann's book *The Church and War* for a fuller development of this thesis. You are entitled to your opinion that the Quakers alone correctly interpret Christ's attitude to war, but please spare me "opinions masquerading as facts," to quote your own words.

I have the greatest admiration for the magnificent work of the Quakers during the reconstruction period, particularly their famine relief in Russia. I know that Quakers have been distinguished for their philanthropy and for their high sense of duty towards their employees. And yet I have always been puzzled to understand their inconsistencies. If verbal literalism is to be our guide in the interpretation of Christ's teaching, then surely we must not employ literalism merely to *avoid* what is disagreeable. Poverty is disagreeable and life in the front-line trenches is disagreeable. A literalism which enables a man to become comfortably rich and to avoid being uncomfortably frightened seems to me open to criticism however much we may admire the sincerity of the Quakers and however much we may be convinced that they are inspired by the noblest of motives in their attitude to war.

I did not criticise you for failing "to take Christ seriously," and incidentally I categorically deny that Christians fail to take Christ seriously. My point was that it is inconsistent of you to pay tremendous compliments to Christ's ethical teaching after devoting most of this book to attacking that teaching in detail.

The most tiresome of all modern forms of cant is the reiterated suggestion that our atheistic moderns possess a subtle sympathy for Jesus Christ which is lacking in most of those who profess and call themselves Christians. One can apparently preach atheism, criticise the institution of the family, deny the future life, and yet exhibit paroxysms of pained surprise if one is criticised as anti-Christian. A certain lady novelist, for instance, who does not believe in God, has recently suggested that she understands the mind of Christ more accurately than St. Paul or any Pope or Bishop, and is very cross if Christians reply with a smile.

All you moderns forget the tremendous insistence of Christ on the idea of a personal God, on eternal punishment, on the ideal of chastity, or on the sacredness of the marriage

tie. Those who "take Christ seriously" on all these points are denounced as insincere Christians merely because they do not agree with your misinterpretation of Christ's views on war.

Nothing, again, could be less scientific than the assumption which underlies the modern attack that a modern is entitled arbitrarily to select those texts which suit his thesis. Why do you assume that Christ preached non-resistance? Your authority for that belief is precisely the same as our authority for the miracles. You cannot logically pin the Christian down to a text if you reject the accuracy of the evangelists as reporters of incidents, for it is notoriously more difficult to report conversation than incidents.

I do not in the least mind defending the gospels on the theory that the Evangelists were more accurate than Boswell, for this theory, though it may create some trivial difficulties for me, creates far more serious difficulties for you. If you accept the Boswellian thesis, how do you explain away the miracles? And if you reject this theory, what is your authority for believing that Jesus prophesied the Second Coming within the lifetime of his disciples?

The verses in St. Mark<sup>1</sup> to which you refer admit of various interpretations. Jesus, it is clear, was prophesying two different things. First, the fall of Jerusalem (verses 14-23), which *did* occur within the lifetime of his disciples. Secondly, the Second Coming (verses 24-29), which did not. Verse 30 might refer either to the fall of Jerusalem or to the Second Coming. Those who incline to the second alternative remind us that the Greek word meaning "generation" need not refer to a particular generation, but can be used in a more general sense for the Jewish race as a whole. It is interesting, by the way, that on this rather complicated point you should quote with so much confidence the "plain man's" verdict, while taking refuge behind a smoke screen of bogus experts where the plain common-sense view favours my thesis.

Of course, if we abandon the literal accuracy assumption, the text presents no difficulty at all. The disciples may well have misunderstood Jesus and confused his two separate prophecies of the Fall of Jerusalem and the Last Judgment respectively. They may very well have reported with Bos-

<sup>1</sup> Chapter xiii.

wellian accuracy certain sayings, but omitted, through misunderstanding, other sayings which would have clarified the nature of the prophecy. I do not see why evolutionists should monopolise the appeal to the imperfections of a record, geological in their case and scriptural in ours. But if you retort that this last argument is tainted with scientific disingenuity, I shall not protest very loudly.

Your attempt to prove that Jesus disapproved of miracles is not very happy. Your case, such as it is, is based on your usual assumption that you can assume the inerrancy of scripture, so far as the texts which suit your thesis are concerned, and disown scripture when confronted with texts you dislike. Moreover, your quotations stop short at the point where they appear to lend support to your thesis. Jesus, you say, called his audience "an evil and adulterous generation" *merely* because they asked for a sign. Why "merely"? It is just conceivable that he called them adulterous because adultery was, then as now, a common failing. But let us continue the quotation.

*"An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*

In other words, Jesus uses the miracle of Jonas as an illustration of the still greater miracle of the Resurrection. Incidentally the quotation which you use to prove that Jesus disapproved of miracles occurs in a chapter describing two separate miracles. Quite a lot of interpolation for one chapter.

Chapter xii, by the time you have done with it, is rather scrappy. Verses 1 to 9 can stand. Verses 10 to 13, which describe a miracle, must go. Verses 22 to 29, which describe another miracle, must go. We can then carry on gaily, but must stop at verse 39 in the middle of Christ's words lest he should appear to give countenance to a miracle. And while you are busy with your scissors, don't forget to cut out St. Mark ii 10, in which Jesus explains that he works miracles as evidence of his divine authority. "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee,

## MIRACLES NEEDED

Arise, and take up thy bed and go thy way into thine house."

You have explained in a few well-chosen words exactly why miracles are necessary. "Mankind is by nature," you write, "sensation-loving; it loves marvels, and is much more disposed to stand gaping for a sign than to reflect upon the implications of an original ethical doctrine."

Precisely. And because the average man is not interested in ethics, *qua* ethics, he pays very little attention to well-meaning ethical teachers. But millions of men have made heroic efforts to model their lives on Christ precisely because Christ proved by miracles that he was God and that he had the "power on earth to forgive sins."

The miracles were intended first to establish the authority of Christ, and secondly to establish the authority of his Church.

Men accepted the ethical system of Christ because they believed him to be God. Many of his famous sayings can be paralleled in Rabbinical literature. Plato had urged men to repay evil with good. The great Greek moralists had preached the duty of benevolence. Chastity was preached by the Stoics. "Nobody was ever the better for the carnal act," writes Epicurus, and Musonius goes further than the severest of Catholic ascetics in his views on marriage.

The world listened to the Christian sentiments of these Christians before Christ, listened and went on its untroubled way. You, who are the product of a Christian tradition, write as if the wild paradoxes of Christ must have struck the world as the most obvious of truisms. But why should we love our enemies? A Roman would have dismissed the mere suggestion with contemptuous laughter. An occasional philosopher might urge such sentiments, but the world had to wait until God became man before these sterile moralisings could be transformed into action. In every age and in every Christian land there have been thousands of men who have patterned their lives on Christ—how many have patterned their lives on Plato?—men who have married poverty, conquered sex, and in the heroic age laughed in the flames and jested on the rack, not because they believed that Jesus was a good man, but because they believed that Jesus was God.

Your attacks on Christianity are so obviously sincere that I hesitate to impute insincerity on any point, but I confess that your pose of indifference to the greatest of all problems, the problem of the Resurrection, seems to me a very silly pose. The orthodox solution to that problem is so clearly the most probable. It is so manifestly difficult to suggest any other solution that it may be best to fall back upon boredom as an excuse for not carrying your investigations any further. The challenge of the Empty Tomb is best avoided by those who suspect that the Emptiness of the Tomb, once established, might revolutionise their outlook and reveal the emptiness of modern philosophy. Even on the lowest grounds you cannot consistently condemn, as you do, the lack of interest which Science has displayed in psychical research without condemning yourself for your lack of interest in the greatest of all psychical phenomena. Surely the Empty Tomb is at least as interesting a problem as the haunted bed which you investigated a few weeks ago.

II.—I want to deal with a few minor points before getting on to your main attack.

In your haste to point out the slip, a rather obvious slip surely, about St. Mark (I wrote "document" for "gospel") you make the very valuable admission, of which I shall remind you later, that the Epistles were written about A.D. 58. St. Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, briefly summarises the main groups of Resurrection appearances. I will come back to this point later.

If you will re-read St. Mark xiv and apply that common sense to which you appeal, your difficulties will vanish. Jesus takes with him St. Peter and James and John. He asks them to wait while he withdraws a few yards. They watch him fall on the ground, and they hear the opening words of the prayer, to which they would naturally listen. But the prayer lasts an hour, and gradually drowsiness overcomes them. "Could not thou watch with me *one hour*?"

Is it really commonsensical to suppose that the moment that Jesus had moved off St. Peter would turn over on his side and prepare himself for a satisfying nap? Sleep conquered him, but it calls for no great imagination to visualise the struggle against sleep.

## LAZARUS

I am unmoved by your accusation of "having it both ways." I can't for the life of me see why I am inconsistent in claiming that the evangelists convince us of their truthfulness by putting in the sort of homely details which an eye-witness would report and of their candour by putting in incidents which tell against themselves or their friends.

Your next point is that it is odd that the mass of the population should have remained unconvinced by the marvels which the disciples found convincing. Far less odd than that scientists as a whole should consider it more important to investigate the Quantum Theory than the miracles at Lourdes. If a modern Lazarus was raised from the dead at Lourdes, would the world be converted? No. We should be told that he had never been dead at all, and you would yawn politely and bid us ignore such "vulgar marvels" and continue to ponder on those few portions of Christ's teaching which you admire.

As a matter of history the miracles of Jesus did make a tremendous impression on his contemporaries. You remember the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. "The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead bare record. For this cause the people also met him, for that they had heard he had done this miracle. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold the world is gone after him."

This does not suggest that his miracles had made no impression.

The earthquake which coincided with the death of Jesus would be explained by his enemies as a coincidence. Others were convinced by it of his innocence, notably the good Centurion. Doubtless those to whom the "peripatetic saints" appeared were converted. We are not told the number of those who saw these marvels, but we do know that the number of the Christian brethren had increased to five hundred before the day of Pentecost.

The Jew has always proved very difficult to convert. The greatest mass conversion of Jews in history occurred in Jerusalem when 3,000 Jews were converted on one day, the day of Pentecost. If your researches had led you to read *The*

*Acts* you would have realised how tremendously Jerusalem was impressed.

You ask me to explain the heroism of the later Christians who were not in direct contact with Christ. Clearly it needed a greater impulse to start the Church after the apparent failure on the Cross, than to keep it going. The first Apostles, humanly speaking, required the Resurrection to transform them into fiery Crusaders. Later Christians accept the Resurrection on evidence and, in so far as they were heroic, their heroism was inspired by that contact with Christ which takes place in prayer and in the sacraments.

And now we come to Ali Mohammed, "The Bab." The first Life of this gentleman, which was written shortly after his lamented execution, "merely depicted a fine human character." Forty years later a biography full of miracles was published. But where is the analogy between Jesus and Bab? In the case of Jesus it was the *first* biographies which were full of miracles. The world had to wait some eighteen hundred years for a biography which "merely depicted a fine human character." You don't give the date of Mr. McCabe's prophecy about Bahaism, a prophecy which reads rather humorously to-day. "Bahaism," says Mr. McCabe, "is spreading over the world, and services are held by its followers in London and New York."

We live and learn. I have yet to meet a Bahaist, and a less "illuminating parallel" to the conquest by the Christians of the capital of the Roman Empire cannot be imagined.

Do you remember Gamaliel's warning to the Pharisees? The Judas who "boasted himself to be somebody" had made a bit of a splash in his day and come to nought. Judas of Galilee had collected a following, but "he also perished." Your friend "The Bab" has joined them in the oblivion which overwhelms false prophets.

"The wild ass stamps o'er his head, but cannot break his sleep." But down the ages we hear Gamaliel's prophetic warning: "If this work be of men, it will come to nought. But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it."

III.—I suppose I must not complain if I receive the same treatment as the Evangelists, if you give my remarks just that little twist in the Joadian direction which is necessary for

## DISCREPANCIES ?

your thesis. "The gospels, I point out, give contradictory accounts of what is apparently the same incident. You concede the point." Did I? Where and when? All I said was that certain "apparent discrepancies" might be difficult to "reconcile." Difficult, but not impossible. An "apparent discrepancy" is not the same thing as a contradiction. All I claimed was that if four people describe the same event their four accounts will seldom tally in every detail. Do please apply to the Resurrection narratives the same "common-sense standards" that you would apply to any historical event. If we had two accounts of the landing of William the Conqueror we should not reject *both* because the first made him land in England with the left foot first, and the second with the right foot first.

All these niggling little points which you raise are so trivial compared with the broad agreement on the main points.

There is one important point which, in common with most people, you have overlooked, a point which I suppose must have been made before.

Nobody suggests that the four evangelists wrote independently. That St. Mark was used by the synoptics, and that the author of St. John's gospel was familiar with the synoptic, is beyond dispute.

You claim a discrepancy between the version in St. Mark, say, and the version in St. Luke. Surely the author of St. Luke would not have contradicted his predecessor without justifying this strong step. Even secular historians do not ignore or contradict a main source without giving reasons for their departure from the received version. St. Luke would surely make some comment, explaining that St. Mark had been misinformed, before proceeding to set his version aside. And the fact that none of these writers appear to realise the existence of any such discrepancies compels us to believe that the discrepancies exist, in so far as they exist, in our imagination alone. Indeed, if instead of snooping around in search of discrepancies we search for the clue which reconciles the apparent discrepancies, we shall have no great difficulty in discovering it.

"Neither said they anything to any man." How, then, you



ask, did St. Mark hear of incidents which the only eye-witnesses kept to themselves? Common sense suggests that St. Mark did not mean to imply that the women were stilled into perpetual silence, but merely that they were silenced for a few hours. And St. Mark himself corroborates this obvious solution in the next verse but one. "Mary Magdalene went and told them that had been with him." You would find the scriptures so much more intelligible if you would read things in their context.

No evangelist professes to be writing a complete biography. St. John explicitly states that the world itself could not contain the books which have to be written, if the record of Christ's sayings and doings was complete. They are writing memoirs, and each writer selects the kind of memoir which suits his purpose. No evangelist pretends to give a complete list of Resurrection appearances.

"As to the number of women," writes Father Knox, "St. Luke (who is always well informed about the women's movements) adds something to St. Matthew's account by mentioning the presence of Joanna, which he had passed over in silence, but not in any way contradicted. The presence of the third woman need not have remained in St. Matthew's memory, and I take it all the witnesses to the Resurrection were anxious to confine themselves to clearly remembered facts made known to them at the time. It may have been Joanna who was positively certain that two angels were present; the others may not have been certain there were more than one."

If one witness says she saw one angel, and another witness that she saw two angels, where is the discrepancy? To prove discrepancy you need the little word "only" in front of the word "one."

After devoting the earlier part of this book to ridiculing the clergy of all denominations, you conclude your attack on the Resurrection by reproving me for my conceit in setting up my opinion against those eminent Christians, Dr. Gardner, Professor Kirsopp Lake, the Rev. J. M. Thomson, and the anonymous author of a modernist article. Why did you not add the Rev. Strauss, also a parson of sorts? Frankly I do not find your list frightfully impressive. I do not think

very much of our modern pinchbeck Strausses. They seem to me less clear-headed than that great enemy of the faith. Professor Lake, for instance, gives away his whole bias by the remark: "The empty tomb is for us doctrinally indefensible." And therefore we jolly well are not going to believe in anything which is condemned by sound modernist doctrine.

But this appeal to authority is a poor argument from a philosopher who rejects authority. Why should I be more impressed by these melancholy modernists than by St. Peter and St. Paul, St. Athanasius and, in our own times, Father D'Arcy and Bishop Gore? Arguments must be met by arguments. I have nowhere attempted to bludgeon you with the fact that I have spent the last quarter of a century reading most of the leading books on this great controversy. I reviewed Mr. Thomson's book—and got a nice letter from him—more than twenty years ago. Most of the authors which you mention, such as Conybeare and Robertson among others, are on my shelves. I have read both sides, whereas you have spent a few days desperately "mugging up" the anti-Christian case. I am as well qualified as Conybeare to form an opinion on this problem, and, if many years of reading round this subject be a qualification, I am better qualified than you. But I make no such claim, for God did not arrange matters so that only by scholarly research could man arrive at the truths necessary for salvation. If you cared to approach this problem with an open mind, you could satisfy yourself after a few days of reading that the evidence for the Resurrection is as strong as any evidence can be which stops short of the coercive. I do not ask you to believe in the Resurrection on the authority of Mr. Morrison (or myself), but you must not ask me to reject the Resurrection on the authority of modernists, however eminent.

"Sit down before fact like a little child" and the solution will not escape you. You have admitted that the theory of collective hallucination is impossible, and you take refuge in the suggestion that the records of these appearances are unreliable. Let me pin you down to what you admit. "Every schoolboy knows," you write, that St. Paul's epistles to the Corinthians was written about A.D. 58, that is, within twenty-

A. L. TO C. E. M. J.

eight years of the Resurrection. In those epistles St. Paul, on the authority of eye-witnesses, gives a summary of the Resurrection appearances. Those eye-witnesses were not, as you admit, the subject of hallucinations. I leave you to defend the only remaining alternative, the theory that the apostles invented the whole story, and were prepared to face death and torture for a monstrous, superfluous, and pointless lie. "I readily believe," wrote Pascal, "those stories whose witnesses get their throats cut."

Yours ever,

ARNOLD LUNN.

## XXXII.

4, EAST HEATH ROAD,  
HAMPSTEAD, N.W. 3.  
October 16th.

MY DEAR LUNN,

I.—I could write another long letter consisting entirely of discussion on points of detail. I could, for example, pursue the question of Jesus's alleged approval of the use of force in "a just war"—what war, by the way, has not been "just" to those who fought it? How, indeed, *could* a war be other than "just" in the view of belligerents who are both judge and jury in their own cause?—and take up the challenge to quote a "single text to suggest that he regarded the military profession as unlawful."

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

"But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . .

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew v. 38, 39, 43, 44).

Jesus's remarks are straightforward and quite unpromising. The soldier's business is to resist aggression with aggression, and, performing it, inevitably he commits violence; he does more, he kills; killing, in fact, is his job. If you and I were faced with a prohibition against wearing clothes of any shade of blue, and I were to point out that its author did not specifically forbid the wearing of policemen's uniforms, and proceeded to infer that in certain circumstances he approved of them, you would say that I was quibbling. To urge in the light of Jesus's unequivocal re-

marks that he did not *in so many words* condemn the military profession is quibbling no less.

Again, I should point out that Jesus's action in the temple, which is such a plain infringement of his teaching in regard to non-violence that you are driven to deny that it is his teaching, is explicable enough on the assumption that Jesus was not an infallible God, but a very remarkable man who, tried beyond endurance by the folly of fools and the wickedness of priests and profiteers, sometimes forgot both himself and his teaching. The same explanation covers the miracle of the man "sick of the palsy." Because people won't attend to him unless he gives them a sign, he yields from time to time to their importunity and, against his own better judgment, makes a compassionate use of his thaumaturgic powers. Once take Jesus off his inhuman pedestal and treat him as a human being, capable of losing his patience when pestered, and becoming as irritable as you or I, and these incidents fall naturally enough into place. Treat him as an infallible God, and you are faced with the necessity of explaining how actions can be unimpeachable and yet contradict teaching which is infallible.

I should further explain to you that I personally see no impossibility in Jesus's possession of thaumaturgic powers, and, when his miracles of healing are reported, my instinctive reaction is not to deny them *merely* because they are apparently miraculous, but to demand very strong evidence indeed to convince me that they happened. I am interested in such evidence, and, if "a modern Lazarus was raised from the dead at Lourdes," should not dismiss the matter with a "polite yawn," but proceed to Lourdes to investigate the evidence for the phenomenon with as enthusiastic a curiosity as I brought to the investigation of the celebrated haunted bed. As it is, I can only deplore the fact that such a first-class miracle is never reported from Lourdes for my investigation.

Again, I should raise my dialectical hands in well-simulated surprise—although I know the argument to be a commonplace of Christian apologetics—at your naïve belief that Christianity has "transformed" the "sterile moralisings" of the Greek and Roman philosophers "into action." Is it really

the case that there have been fewer wars since Christianity came upon the earth?—that men have shown less disposition to resist evil with evil?—that they have been more considerate to the weak, less given to persecution, more tolerant, gentle, and humane?—have not tormented each other? What of Torquemada and the Inquisition, of the Thirty Years War, of the fires of Smithfield, of sadistic judges and debtors' prisons, of the unrestricted lust for profit that made the horrors of the early years of the Industrial Revolution, of the labour of small children in mines and factories? Have you read my previous letters so ill that you can still delude yourself with the belief that Christianity has changed men's conduct? Christians, you say, have laughed in the flames, but so have the widows of Hindus burning in the fires of Suttee, and witches hastening through the flames to the embraces of the devil!

On these matters and many more that you raise I could dilate to some purpose; but I share your distaste for "all these niggling little points," and I think that we shall only bore our readers without convincing each other if we pursue them further. I have decided, therefore, to answer your letter on rather different lines. You rightly see that to almost every one of the detailed points of historical evidence that can be brought forward in a discussion of the Resurrection there is some sort of answer, although you fail to draw the correct deduction that, where so much may be plausibly urged, nothing can be proved. Now what interests me is why two men such as ourselves should be so anxious to put the evidence to such different uses. Why do we each of us emphasise so sedulously the strong points for his own, pick out so delightedly the weak points in the evidence for the other's conclusion? Because, I take it, we start with instinctive predispositions to reach different conclusions. You, in fact, want to believe that Jesus was divine and rose from the dead; I don't.

You say that the "challenge of the Empty Tomb is best avoided by those who suspect that the Emptiness of the Tomb, once established, might revolutionise their outlook." I make you a present of the admissions that, if the "Empty Tomb" were established, it *would* do this, that the resulting revolution

would be a painful and humiliating process, and that, even if the evidence were far more impressive than the tatter of inconsistencies, divergencies and contradictions which is in fact available, I should probably still refuse to credit the fact which it purported to establish; and I think that I can best indicate my position, which is also the position of many moderns, by explaining why I can admit all this.

Acceptance of the Resurrection and all that it implies means probably: (i) That there is a God who created the universe; (ii) that for some unexplained reason He detached a part of Himself known as his Son and despatched Him into the one particular tiny corner of the universe that you and I happen to inhabit; (iii) that He did this during the infinitesimal period of time of which you and I happen to have historical knowledge; and that (iv) we happen to have been born in a country which has adopted a religion which recognises this fact, although the religions of most people refuse to recognise it, and accept instead an equivalent but different set of alleged facts which implicitly contradict it.

The conclusion is that a supreme revelation of the nature of reality, of the origin of the earth, of the personality and intentions of its Creator and of the purpose and destiny of mankind took place in Palestine just under two thousand years ago; that this revelation was the central event in the history not only of this planet but of the universe; and that unless and until it is repeated, nothing of even approximately equivalent importance can occur. It is implied, further, that our remote descendants, infinitely superior to ourselves in knowledge, intellect and, I imagine, æsthetic and spiritual capacity, will still be living on the income of the religious capital of this event, and that their own religious experiences will be limited to confirming and endorsing it. Shakespeare and Bach, Plato, Socrates and Buddha will, in five thousand years, have passed from the memory of man, but this business of "the Empty Tomb" will still remain the supreme fact of cosmic history.

I wonder! No, I don't; for I am sure that, whatever else is true, this is not. The view is so utterly out of perspective. It violates so flagrantly one's sense of cosmic proportion. If I can get you to see this point, I may get you to see also

why so many of us consider this squabble about sources and texts and authorities, and indeed the whole of the issue raised by the preposterous claims of Christianity, a waste of time. I don't for a moment expect that I shall succeed, but, since the point for me is central in our correspondence, I propose to have a good try.

II.—Let us consider, first, the claims of your creed in the light of the equally assertive claims of rival creeds. It is the parochialism of your view that shocks while it amuses me. I can only smile at the naïveté of one who assumes that, while all other gods have passed away—Isis and Ashtoreth, Zeus and Athene, Janus and Vesta, and Yahveh himself once mentioned with awe and venerated by millions—his own will abide for ever. Look for a moment at the record of the religions of the earth. The history of religions is the history of the conflict of contradictory systems each claiming dogmatic finality and absolute truth, while each claim is reduced to absurdity by the very number of the claimants. To the Brahmins the Buddhists are heretics; to the Romans the early Christians were atheists; to the Protestant Catholics are spiritual voluptuaries, even as to the Catholic Protestants are spiritual rebels. Now this religious patriotism, which encourages each creed to flaunt the flag of its exclusive particularity in order the more effectively to damn its rivals, would be comic, if it were not for the volume of human suffering which it has entailed. I cannot stomach a religious absolutism which, believing in a single supernatural revelation, infers that human souls can be saved only if they accept its official view of the nature of its exclusive god. I am not a good enough partisan, and, if I am not, neither is God. The view that God has entrusted his exclusive revelation to any one prophet, expecting all others to borrow from him or to go in spiritual destitution, if they refuse, is to endow the Almighty with the narrowness of a sectary. It is the mark of a small mind to impose its limitations upon the deity, and to legislate for the universe in terms of its own partialities.

Is it, then, altogether beside the mark, looking back over the past history and contemplating the present rivalry of warring creeds, to suggest that the only way to transcend the legacy of hatred, bigotry and conceit that the rivalry has



engendered is to abolish the creeds; the only way to make man religious, to eliminate religions? Anybody who has tried his hand at governing the British Empire knows perfectly well that, until such elimination becomes a practical possibility, his only course is to treat all religions as absolutely equal. It is all very well for you to insist that there is only one true religion, and the English Church that there is only one true brand of it, leaving me to draw the deduction that 89 per cent. of the population of the British Empire are sunk in abysmal error which would have sufficed to consign them to Hell a hundred years ago, even if it only sends them to Purgatory now. But no statesman can afford to entertain for a moment such ludicrously parochial illusions. He has to govern on the assumption that the theology of Luther and Calvin has no more objective validity than that of Rome or Byzantium, that the Virgin Mary is no more a god than Buddha, Jehovah than Krishna, and Jesus no more and no less human than Mahomet or Zoroaster. All religions are equal in the eyes of Government, if only because each is paramount in the eyes of its supporters. Each being judge and jury in its own cause, inevitably each lays claim to absolute truth. This is the claim of the parish pump; it is also the claim of the nursery. What astounds me is that an educated and intelligent man like yourself should join the chorus of villagers and children.

Now look at any one of these creeds in the light of the universe revealed by modern science. Allow me to remind you again of the vastness of that universe and of our own apparent insignificance in it. About two million nebulae are visible through the great 100-inch telescope on Mount Wilson, and I recently read an estimate to the effect that the whole universe is about a thousand million times as big as the area of space visible through this telescope. Each spiral nebula contains enough matter to make a thousand million of our suns. If a thousand million is multiplied by two million, and that again by a thousand million (the average number of the estimated stars in each nebula), the resultant figure gives some indication of the probable number of stars in the universe. It is, Sir James Jeans estimates, "probably something like the total number of grains of sand on all the

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seashores of the world." Now the sun is one such grain of sand; yet the sun is a million times as big as the earth and 300,000 times as massive!

In spite of this immense number of stars, space is almost empty. "If," says Jeans, "we place an apple at the centre of the earth and place a grape-fruit, two more apples, two apricots and a currant in the six continents of the earth's surface, we shall have a fairly good scale model of the arrangement in space of our sun and its six nearest neighbours." There is no reason to suppose that space as a whole is more densely crowded than the region adjacent to our sun; there is, indeed, some reason to suppose that large areas of space are less crowded.

Planets are rare occurrences in the universe; they are also chance occurrences. Yet life, as we know it, can only exist on planets. Hence, Sir James Jeans's estimate that the zones of the universe in which life is possible, added together, constitute less than a thousand million millionth part of the whole of space. I wonder why God made all that space to be so supremely unaffected by so supreme a revelation!

Now look at time. Waiving astronomical figures, let us consider only the biological time-scale—the time-scale of life. The whole past of life upon the earth is reckoned at about twelve hundred million years; of human life, giving all doubtfully human species the benefit of the doubt, at about one million; of human civilisation, on the most generous estimate, about three thousand. I am going to scale down these figures to make them manageable: if we reckon the whole past of life upon the earth at a hundred years, the whole past of human life is reduced to one month, and of human civilisation to just over two hours. Now look at the future: it is estimated that the time during which the earth will remain habitable—the time, that is to say, during which the heat of the sun will be sufficient to maintain life—is about twelve hundred thousand million years, or a thousand times as long as the whole past history of life. Scaling down, we reach the result that a time-scale which reckons the past of human civilisation at something over two hours gives man a future of about a hundred thousand years.

Now what, it seems to me, your view entails is that a very young species consisting of comparatively few ridiculously under-developed beings living in a tiny corner of the universe made habitable by an astronomical accident have been accorded, while still in their spiritual childhood, a supreme revelation in terms of which the true nature and origin of the universe and the meaning and purpose of life are once for all made plain, and the claim to absolute and final truth made on behalf of this revelation means that during the immense tracts of time at their disposal our remote descendants can neither add to it nor modify it. Their spiritual exercises will be limited to reflecting upon its implications.

And, in the light of the universe of modern science, the view is childish. It is absurd to suppose that the human species, including any individuals who may have appeared in or visited the human species, are not biologically provisional and liable to be superseded and forgotten as we have superseded the mesozoic reptiles; it is absurd to suppose that God is really a personage, modelled more or less closely on the concept of a human being and that His son was once exactly like a human being; it is absurd to suppose that the preparation for eternal happiness of a certain variously estimated number of human souls stamped in the likeness of twentieth-century Nordic adults is the purpose for which the whole of creation travails; and it is absurd to suppose that our remote descendants will still be contemplating with pious reverence, or questioning with impious curiosity, the "supreme fact of history." What, I ask you, will our descendants some ten thousand years hence make of these childish beliefs? Will they not regard them as evidence of a geocentric cosmology and an anthropocentric theology which, together with the Buddhocentrism of the Hindu, the Mahometocentrism of the Turk and the Christocentrism of Arnold Lunn, will remind them of the ingenuous boastings of their nursery days, when they naïvely insisted that their knives, their stamp collections, their families and even their countries were better than anybody else's merely because they happened to belong to them? We are all spiritually kings of the castle when we are children. It is at once the mark and the duty of the adult mind to abate

## PAROCHIALISM OF CHRISTIAN CLAIM

these over-weening claims and to achieve a dispassionate realisation of its own objective unimportance.

It is in the light of such a dispassionate view that these remote descendants of ours will regard the claim you make for a revelation of absolute supernatural reality in the person of Christ and of absolute truth in the *de fide* pronouncements of the Catholic Church with the same tolerant amusement as we accord to the Aztec belief that the light of the sun would grow dim if priests did not perpetually feed on human flesh, to the Carib belief that certain animals swallow the sun at nightfall and the moon at daybreak, disgorging them at the right moment for the orderly conduct of nature, or even to the Mahometan belief that heaven is a place in which an unlimited number of female souls, thoughtfully endowed with divine bodies, are placed at the disposal of saved males.

The question at issue is, therefore, for me not so much a question of proving that the Christian record of fact is false or that the Christian revelation in the matter of the Resurrection cannot be substantiated; to a mind awake to the new knowledge of science these time-honoured claims you continue to make seem to be those of a man talking in his sleep.

To ascribe a central position to Jesus in the history of mankind may have accorded well enough with the narrow world picture of the Middle Ages with its few thousand years of human history and its expectation of Christ's return in the comparatively near future to put an end to the universe. But to me and to any modern this whole way of thinking is as unintelligible as it is impertinent. The framework of assumptions required for an understanding of the modern universe has been so widened that the old Christian hypothesis is lost sight of. And that, I suppose, is why, to return to your oft-reiterated complaint, we simply cannot be bothered to give to the Christian hypothesis the attention which you seem to think it still deserves.

Yours ever,  
CYRIL JOAD.

### XXXIII.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY.  
*October 20th, 1932.*

DEAR JOAD,

If you really believe that Christ would have condemned violent resistance to a maniac who was attempting to murder or to rape your daughter, there is nothing further to be said except that we must agree to disagree on this point. If, however, you are prepared to concede that Christ would not condemn the use of violence to prevent murder or rape, you must condone the existence of the police, whose ultimate sanction is force, and if you concede that a Christian state is justified in making use of police to protect the individual from aggression, you cannot logically deny the right of the state to the use of an army—national police—to protect the country from aggression. I agree with you that few wars have been just wars, but I do not agree that no country has ever gone to war with a clear conscience. The Christians who took up arms to save Christendom from the Moguls, the Turks or the Moors, were fully justified on Christian principles. Whatever Christ meant, he cannot have meant that it was either honourable or Christian to hand over large populations of Christian people to the destroying forces of infidel invaders.

I do not think that you can logically quote *any* text against me until you have explained on what principle you accept certain texts and reject others. Your cheerful theory that any text which suits your preconceived theories must be, and that any text which does not suit them cannot possibly be authentic, does more credit to your heart than to your head.

In a later letter I shall justify my "naïve belief" that Christ has changed the lives of men in a way that no Stoic ever changed them.

You cover your retreat from the empty tomb by a smoke-screen of sneers at my naïveté, my parochialism, etc., etc. Oddly enough this is precisely the accusation which is levelled

by Roman Catholics against the modern intelligentsia. If you have read Father Knox's *Broadcast Minds* you will at least concede the complete sincerity of his contempt for the modern mind in all its manifestations. The main difference between Father Knox and the leaders of the intelligentsia is that Father Knox has carefully studied our modern creeds, whereas the average member of the intelligentsia is completely ignorant of Christianity. Let me remind you once again that my quarrel with you people is not that you refuse to take Christianity seriously, but that nothing will stop you from criticising a creed which you are too idle to study (see page 30).

This is not a personal attack, for you at least have challenged a Christian to debate Christianity; most of your fellow moderns take very good care to evade discussion. They content themselves with undocumented sneers.

On the general question of parochialism, has it never occurred to you that whereas no Roman Catholic could ever pay a sincere compliment to those who are seeking to provide a modern substitute for the ancient faith, many moderns who do not accept Christianity are wistfully conscious of the contrast between the coherence of Catholic philosophy and the confusion of all rival creeds? Mr. W. J. Blyton, in his admirable book *The Modern Adventure*, quotes the tribute of an American critic of Catholicism, Mr. J. H. Randall, to that historic Catholic philosophy which Mr. Randall is unable to accept. "Compared with it," he writes, "all the successive philosophies that men have worked out since are mere ephemeral things of a day that have become for us objects of mere historical interest. It is far superior to the fragmentary, inconsistent, self-contradictory views of modern scientists and philosophers. . . . In the face of the uncertainty and confusion, muddled thinking and contradictory ideas that abound in modernist circles, its tenets stand out with clarity and precision. Particularly is this true of the refined and elaborate thought of Catholic philosophy. It has always stood for reason."

If I thought it worth while to discuss your uncivil reference to Christians as "a chorus of villagers and children," I should have no difficulty in compiling a catena of tributes to Christian

thought from non-Christians whom you would recognise as your intellectual superiors.

May I add that I too have been an agnostic, that I too was once impressed with many of the arguments which you employ, but that I ceased to be impressed by them when I began to study the philosophy and history of Christianity. I have passed through your phase and find it difficult to think myself back into the frame of mind of a man who can mention in the same breath Isis and Zeus, Janus and Vesta and the God revealed to us by Jesus Christ.

Nor, on a *priori* ground, can I understand why you should deem it less likely that God should provide mankind with a unique revelation than that he should allow us to struggle towards essential truths by a process of comparing the rival errors of rival prophets.

Nor am I impressed by the physical largeness of the Universe, for the Christian lives in an infinitely larger universe than your little parish. You find it difficult to believe that we can establish contact with spiritual beings transcending in wisdom the accumulated knowledge of Messrs. Shaw, Wells and Bertrand Russell. But the Christian believes in an ascending hierarchy of spiritual beings leading through angels and archangels to the throne of an infinite and transcendent God. Living as he does in a universe which is infinite, spiritually no less than physically, the Christian is mildly puzzled by the fact that you can work yourself up into a blaze of excitement because you have discovered that the stars are really a very long way off. Our remote ancestors were familiar with the mystery of boundless space. The first man who was capable of thinking must have puzzled his head with a problem which worried you and me in our childhood, the problem of endless space and time. Science, it is true, has added a row of noughts to the distance of the furthest stars, but the vastest of measurable distances is infinitely small compared to infinity, and a Christian who thinks in terms of an infinite God is not likely to be worried because the stars seem rather further away to us than they did to our ancestors.

Why did God, you ask, make all this empty space? I haven't the least idea. But I do not reject Christianity because Christianity does not explain what God was aiming

at when he made the morning stars. "It is," as you remarked in your controversy with Mr. Cohen, "the naïve presumption of an undeveloped mind that the workings of the universe should be readily intelligible to undeveloped minds." Read the Book of Job.

"Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven?" Of course you don't, and there is no reason why you should. But there is every reason why you should humble yourself like Job and reply: "Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understand not . . . wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

If these simple facts about the distance of the stars were as destructive of Christianity as you suppose, it is odd that men like Sir Arthur Eddington and the great Jesuit astronomers should continue to peer quite happily through their telescopes at these horribly remote stars. If the great age of the earth was a difficulty, it is strange that we should owe so much of our knowledge about prehistoric men to French priests. But the real scientists would reassure you with the soothing statement that all our knowledge of the stars has added nothing to the message which David read and which you could still read on the face of the evening sky. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork."

Christians do not, as you suggest, assert that the incarnation is the "central event in the history not only of this planet but of the universe." Of this planet—yes, but if Mars is inhabited by people as misguided as our modern thinkers, it is highly probable that God has not left himself without a witness on that planet. Christian theology is silent on the habitability of planets and on the possibility of the incarnation having occurred in other inhabited parts of the Universe.

If, on the other hand, this planet is, as you suggest it may be, the only inhabited part of space, then science has vindicated the mediæval cosmogony which regarded this earth as the scene for a unique experiment. And what bearing has the possibility that this planet may endure for 1,200,000,000 years on the Christian claims? Would you really find it easier to accept Christianity if the earth was approaching its doom?



Surely the longer the earth endures the greater the number of those who need the services of a Church to guide them to Heaven, and the greater the significance of the Incarnation. I cannot see why the case for Christianity is weakened by a theory which increases the number of souls who can profit by the teachings of Christ.

You think of Jesus as a Jewish prophet who lived for thirty years and who uttered a number of moral sentiments which will gradually fade from human memory. But we who believe that Christ is alive to-day, that he speaks to us through his Church with the same authority that he spoke to his disciples, need make no great effort of imagination to realise that his Church will endure to the end, and that a million years hence Christ will speak through his Church, reaffirming those truths which are changeless and eternal. The mental fashion of the day passes. All the views which seem so stimulating and fresh to you will seem horribly dated long before you and I are dead. But the Church is never dated. The Church which proclaims eternal and absolute truths is unaffected by the accidents of time and space, and it is you with your boyish excitement over big distances and long periods of time who are handicapped by a parochial outlook.

Incidentally, has it occurred to you that your case against the Church is weakened on the supposition that the earth will endure for twelve hundred million years? Father Knox has compared the first few centuries of the Church's history to the uncertain swerves of a man who has just mounted a bicycle. The Inquisition was a bad swerve, but the Church has now steadied down on the straight track, and the wobbles of her early history will appear less and less relatively important as the centuries pass.

Your simple faith in progress is disarming in its sincerity. The Christian who asks for evidence before he believes will envy you your uncritical faith. There is no evidence whatever to support your theory that our descendants will be "infinitely"—you deal in large figures, I know—"superior to us" in intellect, æsthetic or spiritual capacity. Do you really consider that the average Londoner of to-day is more intelligent or more spiritual than the average Athenian of

Plato's time, or more quick-witted than the average Cro-Magnon? "The theory of evolution," wrote Huxley, "encourages no millennial anticipations." "The usual course taken by an evolving line," writes Professor Haldane, "has been one of degeneration." Your descendant worship, my dear Joad, will perhaps appear as ridiculous to our descendants as Chinese ancestor worship appears to you.

We are nearer agreement on miracles than I suspected. You concede thaumaturgic powers—that is, miraculous powers—to Jesus. You agree that Christ's miracles normally sprang from his compassionate nature, and I agree with you that he did not make use of "vulgar marvels" to coerce faith. But you cannot consistently dismiss the Resurrection as a "vulgar marvel" unworthy of serious investigation if you would be prepared to investigate an alleged Resurrection at Lourdes. By the way, why don't you go to Lourdes if you have really got an open mind on the subject of miracles? But we will come to that later. It is mere rhetoric to describe the evidence for the Resurrection as a "tatter of inconsistencies, divergencies and contradictions," for you have not proved a single contradiction, and you have not met my point that the test of truth in different accounts of the same incident is substantial accuracy on the main points, not literal identity. Here is a case in point. Whymper and Moore, who took part in the first ascent of the Ecrins, both published accounts of their climb. Moore made no mention of the most sensational incident of the whole expedition, a tremendous leap across a cleft in the ridge. Mr. Coolidge many years later implied that Whymper had invented this story, since Moore must have described so dramatic an episode had it taken place. But Whymper had no difficulty in proving that his account had been submitted to Moore before it had been published, and that Moore had passed it as accurate and truthful.

There are a lot of points in your letter which I can only deal with briefly. The fact that the Government in India find it convenient to treat all religions alike has no more bearing on the claims of Christianity than the fact that Christianity is protected in England by the Blasphemy laws. The fact that there are several claimants to the same property does not prove that no claimant is entitled to the property.

Forged bank notes do not disprove the unique claims of authentic bank notes. The existence of many religions does not prove that God has not made a unique revelation of himself through one religion. The fact that there is some truth in most religions does not prove that Christianity alone is wholly true.

If the evidence for the supernatural was confined to the miracles recorded in the Bible, that evidence would still be difficult to explain away. As it is, every age and every country has contributed a flood of facts which demonstrate the reality of the supernatural, evidence which can only be ignored by those who are determined to ignore all evidence, however scientifically established, which does not fit into their narrow *a priori* conception of the universe.

Nor is the evidence confined to religious miracles. I am not a spiritualist, nor are you, but we both realise that science has so far failed to explain away the evidence accumulated by psychical researchers. Supernormal happenings have been recorded in séance rooms under test conditions which exclude all possibility of fraud.

The real point is that the universe is a much stranger place than the old-fashioned Victorian materialist, such as Mr. Cohen, realised. I am touched by the *pietas* which forbids Mr. Cohen to accept any belief which would have shocked grandpapa Huxley, but his attitude, though edifying in an irreverent age, is not scientific.

Consider for a moment the miracles of healing, of which there have been well-authenticated examples in every century and in every country. You reply that these miracles are the result of auto-suggestion, but you do not transform a prejudice into an explanation by translating your prejudice into a Greek word. The word "auto-suggestion" explains nothing. Which is really the more rational, to believe that God by the exercise of his will has, on certain occasions, united a fractured bone, or to believe that this union takes place as the result of "auto-suggestion"?

"I myself," you write (p. 115), "at a credulous age lost a troublesome wart by virtue of the sincerity of my belief that incantation uttered over it by a quack at a country fair would magically remove it." You must not think me rude if

I am unimpressed by your bare statement and cannot accept it as evidence of a miracle. You may think me sceptical, but you must make allowance for a Christian background. We Christians are trained to separate true miracles from false by exact scrutiny. Your unscientific approach to this problem is only excusable because you are not a Christian. I want to know a great deal more about your wart before I am prepared to consider that a *prima facie* case has been established for investigation. I want to see a medical report of the wart before the quack got busy, and a medical certificate to the effect that the *post hoc* was manifestly *propter hoc*; in other words, I want to be convinced that the wart did not disappear under the normal influences of natural processes.

The medical bureau at Lourdes would not waste five seconds on a case similar to your wart. Medical men, whatever be their religious views, are invited to attend this bureau which examines all the alleged miracles. The bureau has accumulated evidence of a series of cures which cannot possibly be attributed to natural causes. "The cures of all maladies which have a definite psychological or nervous origin are put on one side. We very rarely retain such cases, considering them only as simple ameliorations, even though they may have been very extraordinary. Those cases only are permanently registered which are complete, have stood the test of time, and have been seriously and conscientiously studied in all their details."<sup>1</sup>

It is normally necessary for the patient to present himself a year later for a miracle to be registered as such at the bureau. The cures which have been recorded and attested after this exacting scientific scrutiny include the sudden disappearance of tumours, the sudden union of unhealed fractures of long standing, the sudden drying up of phthisical cavities and the radical cure of lesions of optic nerves.

You tell me that Christian Science achieves equally solid results. The British Medical Association in 1909, and a Committee of doctors and clergymen which concluded their labours in 1914, examined the claims of Christian Science. Both Committees were convinced that there was no evidence

<sup>1</sup> *The Facts of Lourdes*, by Dr. A. Marchand, President of the Medical Bureau at Lourdes, p. 84.

for the genuine cure of organic diseases. You will find their report quoted in *Health and the Mind*, by Mackenzie and Rowe.

I agree that the miracles at Lourdes do not demonstrate the truth of Roman Catholicism, nor even of Christianity, but they do demonstrate the reality of the supernatural. I would not be prepared to deny that miracles have occurred in non-Christian countries. It may well be part of God's scheme to encourage even rudimentary belief in the supernatural by means of miracles.

Similarly, your attempt to explain away the "solid results" of prayer as the results of auto-suggestion is radically unscientific. Consider, for instance, the phenomena of conversion. It is easy enough to produce an ephemeral religious excitement, but it is extremely difficult permanently to transform a character. And yet this miracle was performed again and again during the great evangelical revival of the eighteenth century. John Wesley, the hero of that revival, was a characteristic product of a century which distrusted emotion and which worshipped reason. He was unimpressed by the emotional symptoms of conversion, but he was enough of a rationalist to be impressed by the permanent result. "Saw you him that was a lion till now and is now a lamb; he that was a drunkard, but now exemplarily sober; the whoremonger that was, that now abhors the very lusts of the flesh? These are my living arguments for what I assert, that God now, as aforetime, gives remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost, which may be called visions."

Science teaches us that a force can only be neutralised by an equal or a greater force. When a motor-car travelling at fifty miles an hour stops within fifty yards, we know that the force that impels the motor has been neutralised by another force. Sex impulse is as potent as the force which drives the car, and if we find, as I have elsewhere remarked, example after example of the neutralisation of that force—"the whoremonger that was, that now abhors the very lusts of the flesh"—it is incumbent on us as scientific inquirers to search for the neutralising force. If we cannot discover it, at least let us admit our ignorance instead of talking nonsense about hallucination, auto-suggestion, etc. It would be as reason-

able to suggest that a motor-car is stopped at full speed by auto-suggestion.

Torture provides an even more striking illustration of the neutralisation of forces. You suggested in an earlier letter that the application of a red-hot poker invariably proves an irresistible argument, and I am inclined to agree that it would if nature was not reinforced by supernatural power. Even if you are prepared to "explain" the fact that men have endured prolonged and exquisite torture without denying their faith by the formula of auto-suggestion, you have still to explain the radiant happiness which so many martyrs have displayed in the midst of their torment. The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church, not merely because the martyrs died for their faith, but because so many of them seemed to derive exquisite enjoyment from the process of dying.

It was this sort of thing which impressed men like Seneca. "How much more severe (than any illness)," he writes, "is it to be burnt alive, to be torn to pieces on the rack, to have red-hot irons laid on the body, and a pressure made upon the swollen wound to renew the pain and make it pierce the deeper? And yet there have been those who have endured all this without a groan, nay, more, they asked for no remission; and more, not a word could be extorted from them, yet more they laughed and this right heartily."

There is no analogy between the laughter of Christians under *prolonged* torture and the fanaticism which inspires a Hindoo widow to hurl herself on a blazing pyre. I am, however, inclined to believe that God strengthens supernaturally all those who died for what they believe to be the truth, even if their ideas of truth are mistaken.

And, finally, there is the evidence of mystical experience. You have conceded that it is impossible to explain away mystical experience because mystics, you believe, are in touch with objective reality. There, at least, the pressure of evidence has forced you to abandon auto-suggestion as a solution. The difference between us narrows down to the fact that I am inclined to suspect that St. Theresa's explanation of St. Theresa's experiences are probably nearer the mark than your explanation.

The case for the supernatural rests on a cumulative series of incidents reported in different ages and in different countries. Apart from all other considerations, one's natural bias in favour of an economy of hypotheses would incline one to accept the reality of the supernatural. The disbeliever has to invent a whole series of hypotheses to cover different cases, fraud or hallucination or inaccurate observation, etc. The believer in the supernatural bases his belief on the single hypothesis that the natural order of events is from time to time modified by supernatural agencies. He applies the principle of Occam's famous razor. *Entia non sunt multiplicanda sine ratione.*

Furthermore, I claim to have disproved the vulgar error which represents the Christian as a man who appeals from the evidence of historic and scientific facts to his Faith. It is, as I have shown, the orthodox doctrine of the Resurrection which emerges naturally from the documents. It is the unbeliever who evades an otherwise inescapable conclusion by an appeal to his negative faith in a non-miraculous universe, or, as in your case, by an appeal to the *a priori* prejudices of a personal and private theory of the universe.

You defend the fact that the average modern won't be bothered to examine the evidence for Christianity by the assertion that modern science has rendered Christianity philosophically untenable. In other words, you reject the Resurrection, not because you are dissatisfied with the evidence, but because no evidence could induce you to accept a philosophy which conflicts with your *a priori* view of the universe.

Yours ever,  
ARNOLD LUNN.

NOTE.—Mr. Joad, who received this letter and the next within two days, replied to both together.

## XXXIV.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
KENT.  
*October 22nd, 1932.*

MY DEAR JOAD,

In the first part of this book I was occupied in parrying your attempts to prove that Christianity has been harmful. A more positive statement of the benefits of Christianity is, therefore, called for.

My difficulty is that we appear to be in substantial agreement. You have spoken in the highest terms of the ethical teaching of Christ, and you have explained that the modern world "is in a fair way to destroy itself for want of attention" to that teaching. Clearly, then, you cannot maintain that Christianity is harmful, and your real complaint would seem to be that Christianity has never been tried. You are attacking not Christianity but Christians, or, if you will, organised Christianity. I shall therefore try to show that organised Christianity, or, if you prefer it, the Church, deserves far more credit than you are prepared to give her.

I shall not attempt to prove that the official exponents of Christianity have always behaved like Christians. Indeed, we should expect to find that Christians entrusted with position and power would be in grave danger of succumbing to the temptations of office. It is only a very good man who can remain a very good man in a prominent position.

Few men in history have less excuse for failing to practise what Christ preached than the first twelve apostles, who enjoyed the unique privilege of personal contact with our Lord. Yet those twelve apostles included one who denied and one who betrayed him, and others who, in the moment of crisis, turned and fled. Does that not suggest that Christ meant to prepare us for betrayals in high places? And is the proportion, say, of bad Popes or bad Archbishops of Canterbury, greater than one in twelve?

In an earlier letter you expressed your anxiety lest I should



attribute to Christianity an improvement which you claimed "is in fact due to civilisation." Throughout these letters you have tacitly assumed that you can decide by an *ex cathedra* pronouncement whether a particular event is both *post hoc* and *propter hoc*, or *post hoc* but not *propter hoc*. Health statistics have improved since the invention of contraceptives—*post hoc* and *propter hoc*. Your wart disappeared because a quack told you it would—*post hoc* and *propter hoc*. Christianity declines and the suicide rate increases. *Post hoc*, but not *propter hoc*. The world rapidly improves as Christianity advances. *Post hoc*, but definitely not *propter hoc*.

Let us, for once, try to approach this problem in a scientific spirit. If we find, as we do find, that Christianity from its first appearance began to leaven the brutal world into which Christ was born; if the reforms which you attribute to civilisation were first introduced in Christian lands and tardily adopted by such non-Christian countries as had come under the influence of Western thought; if we find that the men who passed on the torch of protest against cruelty and oppression claimed an apostolic succession derived from Christ; if even the reformers who had rejected Christianity attacked abuses by the same irresistible argument, by the same reiterated appeal to a world leavened, but not revolutionised by Christ, to practise the principles for which Christ died; if we find Christians alternately incited to reform by the appeal of saints, and goaded into reform by the taunts of sceptics; if Christ is accepted as the ultimate standard, alike by humanitarians who believe him to be God and by humanitarians who believe him to be man; if his example is appealed to by a Voltaire no less than by a Wilberforce, by a Joad no less than by a Shaftesbury; if such be the conclusions that emerge from the history of Christian Europe, then surely we must admit that only a prejudice as irrational as it is ingrained, and as ungenerous as it is unscientific, can refuse to ascribe, as is most justly due, all honour for the movements which have redeemed mankind to Christ, the fountain of all compassion, and to those who, for love of him, clothed the naked, tended the prisoner, and visited the sick. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of all my brethren, ye have done it unto me." It was those words which changed the

face of the world; those words, and not a cold abstraction, still less a vague humanitarian ideal.

Ineffective, indeed, is the reformer inspired by a purely ethical ideal compared to the crusader aflame with the love of God and with the love of man made in the image of God. Abstract admiration of virtue too often degenerates into self-admiration. The great Roman Stoics are a case in point. The Stoic apothegms in favour of liberty and natural law are admirable in their way, and profoundly influenced the French and the American revolutionists. But how did they apply these noble principles? Let us see.

Cassius, a famous Stoic, pleaded in the Roman Senate for the enforcement of the cruel law which decreed that, if a slave murdered his master, all the slaves under the same roof should be executed. His eloquence was successful, and six hundred slaves were duly executed because one of them had slain their master. Slaves who were past their work were often conveyed to an island in the Tiber and left to die of hunger. No Stoic protested against this brutal cruelty. Cato gave permission to sell old and infirm slaves. Plutarch, perhaps the best of the Stoics, relates with disgust the fact that Flaminius put a slave to death merely to amuse a guest who had never watched a man die, and that Pollio fed his fishes with the fragments of mutilated slaves; but Plutarch does not come too well out of the story about a slave which will be quoted in due course.

Again, consider the Roman attitude to unwanted children. It was a normal procedure for poor parents to place their children at the foot of the Lactarian column, and for rich mothers who longed for a male heir to discard their superfluous daughters on the same spot. Many of these children died; others were carried off by slave-dealers. Pliny refers quite calmly to the fact that the brains and marrow of these children were keenly sought after by superstitious persons. Seneca, one of the more high-minded Stoics, praised on eugenic grounds the exposure of deformed children. An occasional Stoic protested; an occasional Stoic was content to satisfy his own conscience by a gesture of disapproval; but it needed the dynamic force of Christianity to transform academic humanitarianism into irresistible action. The pagan

humanitarians were ineffective because, unlike the Christian humanitarians, there was no recognised standard to which they could appeal. The great Stoics, for instance, disapproved of the cruel sports of the amphitheatre, but contented themselves with registering academic protests. The Stoic was careful to explain that such things did not appeal to his cultivated tastes. What pleasure, asks Cicero, could a cultured man derive from seeing a weak man torn to pieces by a powerful man? *Sed quæ potest homini polito delectatio?* But neither Cicero nor any other Stoic attempted to inaugurate a campaign against the Games. Cicero was concerned not with the suffering of the man in the arena, but with the reaction of the cultured Stoic in his private box. Consequently the Games continued until a certain monk, Telemachus, who may or may not have been a *homo politus*, leapt into the arena and sealed with his blood a protest which there was no need to repeat, for the protest was instantaneously successful. From that moment the Games ceased.

The force which impelled Telemachus to leap into the arena was a new force. Those who do not recognise its novelty have no sense of historic values. Christianity was dynamic in its effects because it was inspired by a pity which the Stoics seldom felt, and because its driving power was love and not self-satisfaction. A divine compassion. That was the message of the Gospel, a message which challenged the whole basis of Stoic morality.

Seneca, a noble Stoic, declared that we should show clemency, but that we should try not to feel pity. Epictetus kindly permitted us to show sympathy in words, but insisted that we should not lament internally. "The practical teaching of the Stoics," writes Dr. Glover, "deadens, if it does not kill, friendship and family love."<sup>1</sup>

Plutarch wrote an edifying treatise on the duty of restraining anger. He condemned anger not because an angry man was a nuisance to other people, but because an angry man was a nuisance to himself. He was not interested in the effect of anger, cruelty or oppression on its victims, but was solely concerned with the debasing effects of these weaknesses on the individuals who yielded to them. He tells us that he

<sup>1</sup> *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, p. 65.

had once been inclined to punish his slaves severely because slaves, as is notorious, degenerate if they are not frequently beaten. "Later on," he writes, "I realised that it is better to let slaves deteriorate through my forbearance than to pervert myself by bitterness and anger for their reformation." On one occasion a slave who had been ordered a flogging by Plutarch, taunted Plutarch with his inconsistency and quoted from the latter's book *On Controlling Anger*. Plutarch replied quietly, proving that he was not displaying any of the symptoms of anger. His face was not flushed, there was no foam on his lips, he had not even raised his voice, and turning to the man who was flogging the slave he added, "While he and I are debating, do you carry on with your flogging."

Plutarch was in many respects an admirable man, but he was in love not with God but with Plutarch. And by way of contrast to this Stoic faith, let me ask your attention for this picture of St. Peter Claver from Father Martindale's book.<sup>1</sup> St. Peter Claver landed in 1610 at Cartagena, in the Caribbean Sea, the chief slave market of the new world. The slaves arrived at Cartagena packed in bundles of six under decks living in a stench which no white man could "put his head into for fear of fainting."

They arrived, "starving, covered with sores, more than half crazed, eating dirt to hasten their end, so frantically homesick were they; and turned out into a yard filled with such a reek that even the heroic Sandoval went into an icy sweat when a slave-ship was announced, remembering what he had been through last time. Among these it was that Claver laboured unceasingly for *thirty-eight years*."

When a ship was signalled, he went to the port, with medicines, disinfectants, lemons and brandy; he took always interpreters, needed indeed for men terrorised by having been told that their blood was to be used for dyeing the ship's sails, their fat for caulking its sides. He took them to their yards; washed them; dressed their wounds; made beds for them; downright mothered the maddened mob. . . .

He could quell by sheer personality a whole mob running amok. To him men looked, not to scourge or gun, to put order into riot. And when, like him, you have again and again

<sup>1</sup> *What are Saints?*

to rush to the air to be sick because of the stink, there is no room left for sentimentalism, especially if you know you must go back, and go on going back. . . .

At home he concentrated upon two hospitals: St. Sebastian's, a general one; St. Lazarus, his favourite, restricted to lepers. True, he neglected no human item—lint, bandages, ointments, stuff for mosquito-curtains; saw to the landing of sick men—nay, arranged concerts and so forth for them; but they—wise men—knew that this was but the almost negligible fringe of his mere *work*—as nothing compared with his *Self* or what stood as symbol of his *Self*—his mantle, just like those cloths and kerchiefs carried from the very body of St. Peter, in the *Acts*. That mantle served as robe for the leprous; veil for lupus-gnawed faces; pillow for the dying. 'Infections?' Why, the very contact healed. The very edge of his cassock was ever in rags, so did they tear shreds from it: his very signatures were cut from certificates, the very hair that the barber had clipped from his head, the towels stained with the blood that doctors had drawn from him when he himself was sick, for all this people fought, so sure were they that he was what he was—a man filled full of God."

What a contrast! The Roman Stoic fingering his pulse to prove that he feels no anger while his slave is being flogged, and the Christian saint surrounded by negroes. Plutarch, a man filled with Plutarch; Claver, a man filled with God. Surely you must recognise that this tremendous contrast cannot be explained by the mere advance of civilisation. Something new had come into the world.

The humanitarianism which is completely disinterested is rare outside the ranks of saints. Self-importance, the love of meddling and the passion to control other people's lives, often finds expression in the organisation of charity. Politics is a dreary struggle between the have's and the have-not's; it is a common superstition that the Socialist is more altruistic than the Tory. Really disinterested people are no more common among progressives than among reactionaries. Rousseau, the Father of Socialism, was one of the few Socialists who could pity the poor without abusing the rich. To a correspondent who had filled a long letter with invective

against the aristocracy he replied that no man has a right to despise the rich until he has proved that he himself is free from the passion for wealth. *Qui suadet sua det.* The world is seldom impressed except by those *qui sua dent.* It is easy enough to find generals for a humanitarian army; easy enough to find men who will place their pen at the service of the proletariat; but it is not so easy to find men to do the dull and uninteresting work which carries neither prestige nor power. If you want a man to toil for years among the negroes, or to console the lepers, you will be well advised to advertise for a saint.

I do not think that the dregs of humanity are likely to receive much sympathy from a state organised by atheistic reformers. There is a hard note in the attitude of our modern Utopians, the contempt for the obscure which is an echo of pagan Stoicism. "This world and its future," writes Mr. H. G. Wells, "is not for feeble folk any more than it is for selfish folk. It is not for the multitude, but for the best. The best of to-day will be the commonplace of to-morrow" (a view for which, incidentally, there is no scientific support whatever). "If I am something of a social leveller it is not because I want to give silly people a good time, but because I want to make opportunity universal, and not miss out one single being who is worth while."

Christ died for all men, and in his sight "feeble folk" and "silly folk" are as worth while as—Mr. Wells.

Christianity, as I have said, is a leaven and not an alchemist's stone. Baptism is not a magic rite which guarantees that the baptised will practise what Christ preached. Even in the Ages of Faith the Christian who modelled his life on that of Christ was always in a minority, a very small minority. In Christian lands positions of authority in Church and State are often held by men who were Christians because the State religion is Christian, and for no other reason, and between such men and whole-hearted Christians there is perpetual conflict.

I must, however, protest at your controversial trick of refusing Christianity the credit for, say, a Wilberforce, and debiting to Christianity the opposition which Wilberforce encountered from the worldly clergy. Christianity has

always worked through devout men like Wilberforce, and the opposition between real and nominal Christians is exactly what Christ warned us to expect. I think you forget the generous support which Wilberforce received from churchmen such as Paley and Samuel Johnson, and from John Wesley. Wesley's last letter was written to Wilberforce. "Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun), shall vanish before it." And remember that the greater the stress with which you emphasise the opposition to Wilberforce, the greater strength you must allow to the force of Christian conscience operating among the rank and file of Christian men without whom his victory would have been impossible.

The disappearance of slavery in Christian lands is an admirable example of the working of the Christian leaven. I agree in regretting that this leaven did not work more rapidly, but you must remember that Christ did not formally condemn slavery. The influence of the Christian spirit began by improving the status of slaves, and ended by abolishing slavery. Under Constantine and Justinian a series of humane laws were passed which facilitated manumission, which forbade the separation of slaves from their families, and which punished with death the violation of a slave woman. If you wish to credit these reforms to advancing civilisation, you must quote parallel reforms from non-Christian countries. The Church from the first used its influence on behalf of the slave. The Church taught that a pious Christian could perform few works more pleasing to God than the manumission of his slave. In countless instances slaves were redeemed from the funds of the Church. The Order of Our Lady of Ransom redeemed half a million slaves in four centuries. From the earliest times there has been a succession of great churchmen who denounced slavery, among whom may be mentioned St. Gregory of Nyssa and the Popes Pius II, Paul III, Urban VIII, Benedict XIV, Pius VII, Gregory XVI and Pius IX.

In 1537 Pope Paul III declared in a Bull that the natives of America had equal rights before God with their European conquerors, and that all attempts to enslave them were

## THE CHURCH HOLDS THE BALANCE

contrary to the will of God. Exploiters of the Indians were condemned as "instruments of Satan," and the commerce in slaves was declared as null and void.

I have already mentioned among the many reforms due to the Church the civilising work of the great Monastic Orders in the Middle Ages (see page 138). Again, the Church from the first fought a relentless war against black Magic in all its forms. The decline of religion is always followed by an outbreak of superstition—witness Rome at the beginning of the Christian era and London to-day.

The Church has always held the balance between exaggerated asceticism and license. It is unscholarly to fall into the vulgar error which attributes to the Church a horror of sex as such. "The conception of sexual desire as essentially evil and unclean was not something which Christianity brought into the Græco-Roman world," writes Dr. Edwyn Bevan in his admirable book on Christianity in *The Home University Library*, "but something which infiltrated into Christianity from that world. From the sixth century B.C., when the Orphics spread through the Greek world with their motto 'the Body a tomb,' there has been this ascetic strain in Greek society . . . it comes out markedly in Plato."

Christianity not only condemned the Manichæan theory that sex was intrinsically wrong, but vastly improved the status of women. Only one writer of pagan antiquity condemned prostitution. Epictetus, the great Stoic moralist, remarks that women from the age of fourteen onwards can only think of one thing, sexual intercourse with men.

The great reverence which the Church paid to the Mother of God contributed not a little to bring about a revolution in the attitude of the world to women. The high code of mediæval chivalry had its derivation in this worship. Among the charge delivered by King Arthur, who embodied the chivalric ideal for mediæval men, to his knights was the charge "always to do ladies, damosels and gentlewomen service, on pain of death."

Christianity has not succeeded in abolishing war, but it has humanised beyond all recognition the treatment of prisoners and non-combatants. The Red Cross owed its inspiration to the Cross of Calvary. Under Roman law,



prisoners of war were either enslaved or killed. "Howbeit since our realm," wrote an English sixteenth-century historian, "hath received the Christian religion, which makes us all brethren in Christ, men began to have conscience to hold in captivity and such extra bondage him whom they must acknowledge to be their brother; that is, who looketh on Christ and by Christ to have equal portion with them in the Gospel and salvation."

If these reforms were due to humanitarian motives divorced from Christianity, it is difficult to understand why non-Christian nations should have lagged behind Christian nations in this respect. It was not until 1828 that Turkey and Persia agreed to exchange prisoners according to the custom which had long prevailed among Christian nations. Torture as a legal means of obtaining evidence survived in the Japanese legal code until 1873.

You will not need persuading that Christianity has rendered incalculable services to the sick and to the poor, nor will you need to be reminded that hospitals maintained for the benefit of the poor were virtually unknown in the pagan world. But perhaps Charles Darwin's tribute to missionary activity is unknown to you. "Opponents of missions forget or will not remember," writes Charles Darwin, "that human sacrifices and the power of an idolatrous priesthood—a system of profligacy unparalleled in any other part of the world—infanticide a consequence of that system—bloody wars where the conquerors spared neither women nor children—that all these have been abolished, and that dishonesty, intemperance, and licentiousness have been greatly reduced by the introduction of Christianity."

Let me bring this long letter to a conclusion by directing your attention to the economics of an age which was impregnated by the Christian ideal.

The Middle Ages had not surrendered to that fatalistic belief in the mechanical operation of the laws of supply and demand. They believed that all things, including commerce, should be controlled by Catholic philosophy. The mediæval theologians, for instance, laid it down that the just price for an article must include fair wages for the worker no less than a profit for the merchant, and the Church has never

ceased to protest against the theory that labour is a commodity whose value is to be determined solely by its market price. You should read the Encyclical of Leo XIII (*Rerum Novarum*) or the Encyclical of Pius XI (*Quadragesimo anno*) with its powerful plea that proletarian conditions can only be overcome if workers are able to acquire property. There is nothing new in the teaching of these Encyclicals; they merely re-emphasise the teaching of mediæval theologians.

The Church, as you know, condemns usury, which might be defined as interest on unproductive loans. We know that the attempts to fix a just price and to suppress usury failed: whether they would have failed but for the disruption of Christian unity, we cannot say. At least the Church should be given credit for struggling to resist the development of purely soulless capitalism with the results we see to-day.

Mediæval Catholicism, again, is directly responsible for that peasant proprietorship which has been menaced by that industrial civilisation which we owe, among other things, to the Renaissance.

The process which transformed the serf into the peasant proprietor, and which came to its climax in the Middle Ages, was reversed at the Renaissance. Since the Renaissance there has been a steady struggle between the Christian tradition and the tradition which is trying to transform the peasant proprietor into the serf. In Russia the wheel has come full circle, and the serf is on the point of becoming a slave.

The most successful attempt that has ever been made to solve the as yet unsolved riddle of social justice was the attempt which found expression in the mediæval Guilds. Mr. G. D. H. Cole, the famous Socialist, who is no friend of Christianity but who is a scholar with a sympathetic understanding of the Middle Ages, recognises that the mediæval Guilds were an institution nearer his ideal than anything to be found in the modern world.

The Guild was egalitarian. It aimed at ensuring equal rates of payment and equal conditions of labour. Thanks to the Guild, common men could work in their own homes with their own tools for their own profit. The Guild translated into economics the Christian dogma of the infinite worth of every human soul.

"Notwithstanding the aristocratic organisation of mediæval life," writes Lord Conway, "the strong line of division between rich and poor did not then exist. That has been one of the most conspicuous products of the insane cry for 'Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity' under the echoes of which the revolutionists of Paris banished the reality of all three from the soil of Europe."

All beauty is a revelation of the divine. A society which is impregnated with Christian truth will produce nobler art and nobler architecture than a society which is impregnated with error. This was, as you know, the thesis which Ruskin set out to prove in his *Stones of Venice*.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not arguing that Christianity is true because I prefer Bellini's *Madonna of the Trees* to Epstein's *Rima*. All I claim is that whereas the unimaginative ugliness of Victorian Baker Street reflects an industrialism which has lost its soul, there is hardly a mediæval house still remaining without some hint of that beauty which was the true child of Catholic industrialism.

And in assessing our debt to Christianity, we may well ask ourselves what would be left of the National Gallery if men had never been inspired to translate into paint the supreme beauty of the Gospel story.

Beauty in the Middle Ages was not the monopoly of clique; it was the common heritage of all men. Craftsmanship before profit, beauty before quick returns; such were the ideals of every grade of society. Beauty found expression in the common things of common men, in the peasant's hut no less than in the palace, in the carving of chairs and tables for the workman's house no less than in the carving of statues for the workman's church. There is more vitality and more beauty in the imperfections of inferior Gothic than in the cold correctness of the noblest Renaissance architecture.

Let me conclude with a quotation from the greatest chapter Ruskin ever wrote, his chapter on *The Nature of Gothic*:

"The Greek gave to the lower workman no subject which he could not perfectly execute. The Assyrians gave him subjects which he could only execute imperfectly, but fixed

a legal standard for his imperfection. The workman was, in both systems, a slave. . . .

But in the mediæval, or especially Christian, system of ornament, this slavery is done away with altogether; Christianity having recognised, in small things as well as great, *the individual value of every soul*. . . . And it is, perhaps, the principal admirableness of the Gothic schools of architecture, that they thus receive the results of the labour of inferior minds; and out of fragments full of imperfection, and betraying that imperfection in every touch, indulgently raise up a stately and unaccusable whole. . . .

Gaze upon the old cathedral front, where you have smiled so often at the fantastic ignorance of the old sculptors: examine once more those ugly goblins, and formless monsters, and stern statues, anatomiless and rigid; but do not mock at them, for they are signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone; a freedom of thought and rank in scale of being such as no laws, no charters, no charities can secure; but which it must be the first aim of all Europe at this day to regain for her children."

It is not the free-thinkers who will recapture for Europe her lost "freedom of thought and rank in the scale of being." Europe will only restore dignity and freedom to common men when she renews her allegiance to One "whose service is perfect freedom."

You have complained more than once that no government has ever acted for five minutes on Christian principles. I concede that no government has been permeated through and through with Christian ideals, but I do claim that in the Middle Ages a serious attempt was made to permeate economics with Christianity, and I disagree with the statement that you have made elsewhere that "taking Christ seriously" must necessarily involve "disbanding our armies, scrapping our navies, sacking our judges and lawyers and closing our prisons." If Christianity necessarily meant the inauguration of a reign of chaos, such as handing over Europe to communist Russia, I for one should not be a Christian. I agree with you, however, that Christianity should mean a more equitable distribution of this world's goods.

But Governments have been far more influenced than you

are prepared to admit by Christian thought. Even in the course of the last hundred years, a century during which the Church was handicapped by its close association with Victorian industrialism, slavery was abolished, Factory Acts were passed, and old age pensions were instituted; but I agree with you that we are still a long way from making a whole-hearted attempt to apply Christianity to economic evils. I do not believe that a Christian need necessarily be a Communist or even a Socialist, but I do not think it possible for a Christian whole-heartedly to admire our modern economic system. We are, I believe, farther away from Christian economics than our ancestors in the Middle Ages. Mr. Bernard Shaw talked very good sense when he remarked of a modern thinker that "he was ultra-modern—not merely up-to-date, but far ahead of it. He started from the thirteenth century simply because he wished to start from the most advanced point for the most backward one (his own time)."

Apart from all questions of humanitarian reform, Christianity has added to the sum total of human happiness. I do not say that all Christians are happy, but the genuinely convinced Christians, for whom the supernatural is as real as the natural and whose highest ambition is to pattern their lives on the example of their founder, have, as a mere matter of historical fact, proved that poverty, unpopularity, sickness and physical suffering cannot affect the happiness which is the fruit of faith.

Christianity has brought romance into millions of dull lives. It is easy to be amusing at the expense of pious women, particularly if they are unmarried (incidentally, of all jokes, the musical jokes at the expense of spinsters always seem to me as devoid of humour as they are cruel and un-Christian). But surely there is something to be said for a religion which can take the place of the family in otherwise empty lives.

Bertrand Russell in a famous passage, a passage in which rhetoric takes the place of reason, informs the expectant world anxious for the new gospel that "only on the firm foundations of unyielding despair can the soul's habitation be safely built." Mr. Bertrand Russell, with the charming inconsistency of our moderns, has also written a book on the conquest of happiness.

## THE JOYOUS CHRISTIAN

I do not claim that Christianity is true because it makes men happy. I have given my reasons for believing that Christianity is true, and I am now only concerned to show that the "conquest of happiness" is easy for a Christian and extremely difficult for an atheist.

Drop into any workhouse or hospital, and you will have no difficulty in picking out the convinced Christian. The faith which enabled men to laugh in the flames and to jest on the rack has not lost its ancient power. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long. We are accounted as sheep before the slaughter. Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

*Quis separabit?* Paul's triumphant cry has been re-echoed by generation after generation of Christian men.

The disintegration of belief always coincides with a rising tide of despair. You tell me that this is merely a temporary phenomena, that the suicide rate, which is rising, will fall when you moderns have imposed your creed upon the world. Jam to-morrow, but most decidedly not jam to-day. You must forgive me for suspending judgment until you can produce some evidence of the power of modernism to transform poison into jam, and erect on "the firm foundations of unyielding despair" a creed which will result in "the conquest of happiness."

The more clear-sighted of our modern writers are ceasing to promise jam to-morrow. The Utopian forecast is giving way to a resigned but cynical acceptance of life as a futile and pointless accident in a universe of lifeless matter. I suppose you are familiar with the novels of that brilliant modern, Miss Sackville-West. One of her characters remarks: "We are so aware of our own insufficiency that we take refuge in mere negation. Enjoyment is the only positive thing left to us, and even that, like a surfeit of sweets, makes us sick." Mr. Aldous Huxley's newest book, *Brave New World*, has incensed the Utopians. "I suppose you enjoyed that book," remarked Mr. Wells to me the other day. "It must have given you great pleasure to find a scientist fouling his own nest." "There is still the old source of strength," says Rachel Quarles, one of

A. L. TO C. E. M. J.

Aldous Huxley's characters, "old, but not dull. There is nothing less dull than God. But most young people won't believe me when I tell them so, even though they are bored to death with jazz bands and dancing. They are on the wrong road. If people ask how can we please God, and why aren't we better, they would achieve happiness without ever thinking of it."

The case for Christianity ultimately rests, not on the achievements of those Governments which are nominally Christian, but on the type of life produced by its best exponents, on the millions of men and women who have patterned their lives on Christ and found happiness by serving him and by sacrificing self. This type is not so uncommon as you seem to think. I cannot, of course, produce statistics to prove the frequency of this type, nor can I prove by dialectics that the finest product of Christianity differs in kind no less than in degree from the finest product of other religions. I cannot convince you against your will. I can only indicate the lines on which you might continue your researches if you were anxious to discover the facts about Christianity rather than facts which tell against Christianity.

Yours ever,  
ARNOLD LUNN.

XXXV.

4, EAST HEATH ROAD,  
HAMPSTEAD, N.W. 3.  
*October 28th, 1932.*

MY DEAR LUNN,

You really are an impudent fellow. For weeks past you have been grumbling about the length of my letters and, ignoring the fact that you wrote a good half of it, have complained that the first section of the book in which I took the offensive, explaining why I am not a Christian, has occupied nearly two-thirds of our allotted space, leaving you only one-third in which to develop the positive side of your case. Presumably to give point to this complaint, I now receive two successive letters from you, the first seventeen pages long, in answer to mine, and the second running to thirty typed pages, the longest on record from either of us, ranging over an immense miscellany of subjects, from the ugliness of Victorian buildings to the theories of Bertrand Russell, and from Plutarch's views on the treatment of slaves to those of Ruskin on Gothic architecture, describing the nature and objects of the Mediæval Guild, containing an elaborate and, I should have thought, wholly irrelevant panegyric on peasant proprietorship, and raising a thousand and one different issues more or less remote from our purpose.

What am I to do? If I reply in kind, I shall incur your censure for prolixity and my own for irrelevance. If I don't—but I am not going to reply in kind, so you shall see for yourself what happens, if I don't. In reply to the first of your two letters, I propose to say nothing except to ask why such a persistent belabouring of auto-suggestion? I don't remember bringing it up. Why, then, all this fuss?

Now for your second! As I read through your letters, I jot notes in the margin indicating statements which call for comment or contradiction. There is scarcely a paragraph in this second letter of yours without its marginal jotting, and contradiction, not comment, is the note sounded. All through



the letter I have the impression of special pleading; either your facts are simply wrong, or they do not bear the interpretation you place upon them, or they have been arbitrarily selected from a mass of other facts which point in an entirely different direction. If I were to take up these points and treat them as they deserve, I should write a letter as long or longer than your own.

You tell me that I have already had my fling at the Church and that in the interests of space I must refrain. Very well, then, I refrain! But just to give you an inkling of the extent and quality of my disagreements I offer you one or two samples of what, if space permitted, would have been my treatment of your letter as a whole.

"Christianity," you say, "... has humanised beyond all recognition the treatment of prisoners and non-combatants," thereby deducing a general improvement in the kindliness and humanity of our race due to the spread of Christ's teaching.

Any book about any recent war should suffice to disabuse you of so preposterous a delusion. I quote from the one I happen to be reading at the moment—Yeats Brown's *Golden Horn*—a passage relating to the treatment of Bulgars by *Christian* Serbs: "Then he went on to speak of the crimes committed by the Servians against the Bulgarians. A lieutenant of artillery had been found disembowelled, with a barley-sheaf stuffed into his abdomen; a soldier had had his eyes gouged out and military buttons put in their place; a peasant had had his ears bitten off; a baby was cooked alive; and a cavalryman was discovered scalped, with parts of his body cut off and thrust into his mouth.

I drew a long breath, and thought, Is this true? If it isn't, who would invent such hideous stories? If it is true, then would it be wrong to think that:

... such a world began  
... In some slow devil's heart that hated man?

The stories he had related would appear in Austrian official documents; and they were, in fact, published, just as he had told them to me.

Here we were, sitting over our friendly cup of tea, swop-

ping tales of savagery which no savage untouched by civilisation would have the hardihood to perpetrate."

Earlier in the book are passages describing similar atrocities by *Christian* Bulgars against Serbs, by *Christian* Serbs and Armenians against Turks, by *Christian* Greeks and Serbs against Bulgars, and so on. . . . "Under Roman law," you mildly remark, "prisoners of war were either enslaved or killed." I'd like to be killed rather than suffer the treatment "humanised" by Christianity. Have you, by the way, read Hessel Tiltmann's book, *The Terror in Europe*? It describes the various "Terrors" which have raged in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe since the war. The number of persons flogged to death, burnt to death, tortured to death in unspeakable ways during the last thirteen years runs into hundreds of thousands. I commend to you more particularly the details of the pacification of the Polish Ukraine. You tell me that "non-Christian nations . . . have lagged behind Christian nations" in regard to their treatment of the captive and the weak. You are thinking of the Incas of Peru, I suppose, compared with the *Christian* Spaniards who conquered them, or those terrible "savages" of Polynesia before the *Christian* Europeans "humanised" them by infecting them with our vices and our diseases! Surely you cannot be so innocent as to suppose that the cruelties of civilised man do not exceed those of savages as much as those of savages exceed the cruelties of animals. In this sense it may be true that Christianity is a great "civilising" force, but I doubt if you would agree to this interpretation.

Now the influence of the Church, as you yourself aver, reached its maximum in the early Middle Ages. This, then, if your thesis is correct, should be the period of maximum humanity in the treatment of the captive and the weak. The following passage from Gibbon affords an interesting commentary upon this supposition. He is describing (chapter lviii) the capture of Jerusalem by the crusaders under Godfrey of Bouillon:

"A bloody sacrifice was offered by his mistaken votaries to the God of the Christians: resistance might provoke, but neither age nor sex could mollify, their implacable rage: they

indulged themselves three days in a promiscuous massacre; and the infection of the dead bodies produced an epidemical disease. After seventy-thousand Moslems had been put to the sword, and the harmless Jews had been burnt in their synagogue, they could still reserve a multitude of captives, whom interest or lassitude persuaded them to spare."

Nor, in the light of Christian theory, should these details of Christian practice occasion surprise. Here, for example, is a passage from that sacred Christian textbook, the Old Testament, continuously read in church and commended to our special attention, although not, I trust, to our emulation:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites. . . . And they slew all the males. . . . And the children of Israel took all the women of the Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods. . . . And they burnt all their cities, wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles with fire. . . . And they took all the spoil, and all the prey, both of men and of beasts. . . . And Moses was wroth. . . . And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. . . . But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves" (Num. xxxi 1-18).

The story is rendered the more detestable, when one remembers that Moses had been given shelter by the Midianites for forty years after he had fled from Egypt as a young man.

Such improvement in the treatment of prisoners as has occurred has been mainly due, as you probably know as well as I do, to *unofficial* Christian bodies such as Quakers and to advanced Free-thinkers.

I never knew a man more unfortunate in his illustrations! For example, you cite Wilberforce as a shining example of the Christian gentleman whose virtues put into shade those sterile Stoics of the ancient world. Allow me, then, since you have set the precedent of lengthy quotation, to retail to

## WILBERFORCE VERSUS JULIAN

you a story about Wilberforce taken from *The Town Labourer*, by J. L. and Barbara Hammond.

"A special feature of this prison was the extraordinary treatment of persons who were not convicted of any crime. In one case a young girl had been kept in prison in order to be called as a witness against a man accused of attempting to rape her. There was no intention of bringing any charge against the girl herself. When the trial came on she was too ill to give evidence. It was discovered that she had been kept on bread and water for a month, and that though she was the wronged party in the case that was to be tried, she had been treated with a cruelty that would have been indefensible, if it had been inflicted on a convicted and sentenced prisoner. The Grand Jury and the Traverse Jury of the County of Middlesex both made presentments calling attention to the grave abuses of this prison, in which the fate of persons, who were neither charged nor convicted, depended entirely on their ability to pay for the necessities of life. . . . The House of Commons was ultimately brought to take note of the fact that unconvicted persons were regularly kept without food for seventeen or eighteen hours at a time. One of the strongest speeches against the inquiry was made by Wilberforce, who met the complaint that innocent persons were being used brutally with the happy remark that 'It ought never to be forgotten that men who expose themselves to suspicion must often incur the disadvantages of guilt.' In an illuminating passage he remarked that 'the minutes of the sittings of the Magistrates, to which he had alluded, would serve to show what had been the conduct of some of the prisoners, and the necessity there was to watch them with care. It appeared in these minutes that it was stated by the chaplain that two of the persons confined in this place, Burkes and Scott, had behaved so ill at church, had so openly expressed their contempt of the worship, that he proposed that their attendance should in future be dispensed with.' "

Now contrast this *Christian* treatment of those who have been so unfortunate as to incur suspicion with the sentiments of the Pagan Emperor Julian on the same subject. I quote from his "Letter to a Priest":

“And I will assert, even though it be paradoxical to say so, that it would be a pious act to share our clothes and food even with the wicked. For it is to the humanity in a man that we give, and not to his moral character. Hence I think that even those who are shut up in prison have a right to the same sort of care; since this kind of philanthropy will not hinder justice. For when many have been shut up in prison to await trial, of whom some will be found guilty, while others will prove to be innocent, it would be harsh indeed if out of regard for the guiltless we should not bestow some pity on the guilty also, or, again, if on account of the guilty we should behave ruthlessly and inhumanely to those also who have done no wrong.”

How noble is the influence of Christianity when it can substitute the sentiments of a Wilberforce for those of a Julian!

Wilberforce with Pitt was responsible for the Combination Laws. These laws sought to restrain combinations among workers formed to ameliorate the conditions under which they worked. Those who “combined” with this object were punished with savage sentences of imprisonment and transportation. What were the conditions which they strove to ameliorate? Here are a couple of quotations taken at random from the Children’s Employment Commission (First Report, Mines), 1842:

“One of the sub-commissioners remarked: ‘I can never forget the first unfortunate creature (of this class) that I met with: it was a boy of about eight years old, who looked at me as I passed through with an expression of countenance the most abject and idiotic—like a thing, a creeping thing peculiar to the place.’ The trappers generally sat in a little hole, made at the side of the door, holding a string in their hand, for twelve hours. As a rule they were in the dark, but sometimes a good-natured collier would give them a bit of candle. In the West Riding the work of hurrying or pushing the corves was often done by girls at the time of the Report: ‘Chained, belted, harnessed like dogs in a go-cart, black, saturated with wet, and more than half naked—crawling upon their hands and feet, and dragging their heavy loads behind

them—they present an appearance indescribably disgusting and unnatural.’

The hours varied in different parts of England. The Commission put them at twelve in Staffordshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire, and Leicestershire, and at from thirteen to sixteen in Derbyshire.”

The fourteen or fifteen hours’ confinement for six days a week were the ‘regular’ hours: in busy times hours were elastic, and sometimes stretched to a length that seems almost incredible. Work from 3 a.m. to 10 p.m. was not unknown; in Mr. Varley’s mill, all through the summer, they worked from 3.30 a.m. to 9.30 p.m. At the mill, aptly called ‘Hell Bay,’ for two months at a time, they not only worked regularly from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m., but for two nights each week worked all through the night as well. The more humane employers contented themselves when busy with a spell of sixteen hours (5 a.m. to 9 p.m.).

It was physically impossible to keep such a system working at all except by the driving power of terror. The overseers who gave evidence before Sadler’s Committee did not deny that their methods were brutal. They said that they had either to exact the full quota of work, or to be dismissed, and in these circumstances pity was a luxury that men with families depending upon them could not allow themselves. The punishments for arriving late in the morning had to be made cruel enough to overcome the temptation of tired children to take more than three or four hours in bed. One witness before Sadler’s Committee had known a child, who had reached home at eleven o’clock one night, get up at two o’clock next morning in panic and limp to the mill gate. In some mills scarcely an hour passed in the long day without the sound of beating and cries of pain. Fathers beat their own children to save them from a worse beating by their overseers. In the afternoon the strain grew so severe that the heavy iron stick known as the billy-roller was in constant use, and, even then, it happened not infrequently that a small child, as he dozed, tumbled into the machine beside him, to be mangled for life, or, if he were fortunate, to find a longer Lethe than his stolen sleep.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Town Labourer*, by Barbara and J. L. Hammond, pp. 159, 160.

All this took place in Christian England after the "humanising" influence of the Church had been in full blast for nineteen hundred years. Until organisation and combination gave the workers sufficient power to protect themselves, the conditions persisted practically unmodified. Wilberforce, who felt so strongly about the evils of the Slave Trade, supported the Combination Laws making Trade Unions illegal. So did the Church. Good old Wilberforce! Good old Church!

As I said above, there is scarcely a paragraph in your letter which doesn't lay itself open to similarly devastating comment. And you expose yourself in this way because you have set yourself the impossible task of trying to show that Christianity has really changed men's conduct and changed it for the better. In fact, so far as I can see, it has made practically no difference. You can find evidence to support your view, just as you can find other evidence to contradict it. The English are probably more humane than the Turks, but taken as a whole it cannot be said that Christian nations are either more or less humane than non-Christian nations taken as a whole. The inhabitants of India are probably more humane than those of Bulgaria. Similarly with individuals. For two thousand years the method of direct exhortation has been employed with the object of making people truthful, honest, altruistic, unselfish, kindly and long-suffering, with the result that they have been changed so little that almost any description of human nature given in classical times fits the modern man like a glove. Read, as I have read recently, the accounts of the tyrannic, the aristocratic and the democratic man in the eighth and ninth books of Plato's *Republic*. There is scarcely a paragraph that does not bring directly to the mind its modern illustration. In fact, the whole account might, with certain small modifications necessitated by change of time and place, have appeared as an article in one of our ethical or political quarterlies.

Above all, I must insist that Christianity has not increased our humanity. Consider the facts of the fur trade. A hundred million skins are imported into England every year. Every day, throughout the year, two hundred and seventy thousand animals die painfully in order that our women may wear

## THE FUR TRADE

furs. Rabbits are being caught in steel traps which crush their legs and hold them for hours or days of torture. A catalogue which I have recently looked through, issued by a big American trap company, publishes photographs taken by the trappers for the purpose of showing different types of trap. Incidentally, though it is not its purpose, it illustrates the terror and pain endured by the trapped animal. You see in these pictures the fixed terror in the eye, the weariness unto death that comes after long agony, the mute appeal of an animal suffering to the utmost limit of its capacity. Many animals gnaw off their own feet in order to escape. "It is nothing unusual," I read, "for trappers to lose one-third of their catch, finding feet only." "A mighty disappointing experience!" is the grim comment. A new model of a trap is accordingly recommended with a grip so effective that "even if the foot is gnawed off to the underside of the jaw (of the steel trap), there is no chance to gnaw free."

I read also that in large areas of Canada the area to be covered by each trapper is so great that he can only visit his traps once a week, so that animals who are caught have either to die of slow starvation or to gnaw through their own limbs to win free. Remember the figures; a hundred million pelts a year, not including "rabbit and mole and musk-rat"! Reflect for a moment upon the total amount of misery and agony involved, and then reflect upon the amount of public indignation which it evokes in our so highly civilised and Christianised people. It is vanity, not warmth, that demands this immense provision of furs; artificial furs would serve equally well. That women's vanity should be greater than their humanity is in no way surprising. What puzzles me is that you should represent them as imbued with the principles of Christianity. Remember Christ on the subject of sparrows!

On your second letter as a whole there is one general comment which I cannot refrain from making. You seem to be quite unable to make up your mind whether the influence of Christianity advances or recedes. When you speak of the freeing of slaves, you seem to imply that Christianity reached its zenith in the nineteenth century; at other times, looking back regretfully to the days of the Chestertonian Guild and



the Bellocian peasant, you imply that it has receded since the Renaissance. This confusion in your mind has its own dialectical advantages, because it enables you to represent whatever is admirable as the result of the spread of Christianity, whatever is abominable as evidence of the lack of it. In the nineteenth century the freeing of slaves is good. Admirable! Christianity has advanced. The economic system is, however, bad. Deplorable! Christian principles have not percolated. In the Middle Ages the Guild system is good. Obviously the Christian principle of respect for human personality is well absorbed. Slaves, however, still exist, and, when they are not slaves, they are serfs. Conclusion! Christian principles are not yet sufficiently acknowledged. Treating your evidence in this way, you can reach any conclusion you please, but no conviction is carried to those who do not already share your conclusion. And why, in the name of all that is reasonable, is it a bull-point for Christianity that it regards, as you say it does, "feeble folk" and "silly folk" "as worth while as—Mr. Wells." Nobody with any sense of values could entertain for a moment so absurd a proposition, and from your subsequent strictures upon the levelling tendencies and soulless uniformity introduced by the Industrial Revolution I infer that you don't really entertain it yourself.

Since you seem so completely at a loss to know whether the influence of Christianity grows or diminishes, perhaps you will allow me to enlighten your perplexity. The influence of Christianity has diminished, is diminishing and will still further diminish. You have only to look at the Churches to-day—but on reflection a view of the Churches to-day requires a letter to itself. It shall, in fact, form the subject of a brief concluding letter.

Yours ever,  
CYRIL JOAD.

## XXXVI.

4, EAST HEATH ROAD,  
HAMPSTEAD, N.W. 3.  
2nd November, 1932.

MY DEAR LUNN,

You may remember that you were in some doubt as to whether the influence of Christianity was growing or declining. I promised, at the end of my last letter, to resolve that doubt for you, and I must now, within the very brief space which is all that remains to me, do my best to keep my promise.

Anything like a comprehensive survey of the present position of the Church being precluded by considerations of space, let us adopt the cinematographic method and take a few "shots" of the Church in action. Here, then, are a few vignettes of some of the many-sided activities of the Church militant.

A. *I begin with the Church Fundamentalist.* The following is a quotation from a memorandum recently addressed by a congregation of Fundamentalists to the President of the United States, praying him "to restrain the activities of those engaged in impiously exploiting the stores of petroleum deposited in the territory of the United States Republic, which the Lord has manifestly placed there to assist His purposes on the Last Day." I shall not soil this with comment.

B. *I proceed to the Church Diplomatically Cautious.* Here we are in sight of an ecclesiastical attitude so inevitably familiar to our readers that it may be epitomised by a phrase. I take my phrase from the report of a committee appointed by the Pan-Anglican Synod held at Lambeth in 1888, to consider what should be the attitude of the Church towards Socialism. After announcing that the principles of Socialism are not inconsistent with those of Christianity, the report proceeds to assert in classic phrase that it behoves the Church "to act *safely* as well as *sublimely*"<sup>1</sup> in regard to this "eminently Christian" doctrine.

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

C. *I proceed via the Church Hypocritical.* "Divisions are mustered. The Band plays 'Voices of the Guns,' and, standing beneath the 15-inch muzzles, we sing in the bright sunlight, 'Hark, my soul, it is the Lord'—a strangely moving proceeding" (*News Chronicle*). To:

D. *The Church Funny.* "At to-morrow's meeting of Ealing Council a petition will be presented in favour of the Sunday use of the children's chutes and other amusement apparatus in the public parks. The Churches have objected to such use of the parks on Sundays. Among the critics was Mr. E. H. Brooks, a Methodist preacher and council member, who declared that Church-people by opposing these games could 'win such a victory as will make the Devil and the Gates of Hell shake'" (*Evening Standard*).

We come now to:

E. *The Church Hearty.* This is a peculiarly Anglican feature. The average serious parson to-day repudiates most of the supernatural elements in Christianity upon which you have so creditably insisted in our correspondence. If very serious, he sometimes repudiates the lot. If, on the other hand, he is a gentleman, his main concern is to show that he is a good sport and not a mealy-mouthed parson.

Accordingly (i) he finds spiritual value in not playing, mark you, but watching football.

"Football crowds were praised by the Rev. Bertram Smith. 'Let me put in a good word for football, not only playing it, but watching it,' he said. 'It is easy to be cynical about crowds of men and women growing excited about the achievement of their favourite teams, but it is very foolish.

Watching football is of distinct spiritual value. It is good to link oneself in unselfish interest to the fortunes of the team with no hope of material gain. It is at any rate a window into a larger life'" (*Evening Standard*).

(ii) Or in playing bowls. I commend to your special notice the whole of the ensuing as a witness (that, I believe, is the ecclesiastical term) of what, to put it vulgarly, the Church has come to:

## THE CHURCH ADVERTISES

### PUBLICITY "DRIVE" IN TWO CHURCHES

"*Tennis and Bowls.*—The Rev. Manby Lloyd—a cousin of Lord Lloyd—rector of the tiny twin wayside villages of Callow and Dewsall, near Hereford, has also been conducting an advertising 'drive.' 'Come to Callow Church and picnic under the Tulip Tree, only half a mile from the Angel Inn,' his advertisement reads.

"The Hereford correspondent of the *Daily Express* yesterday, in company with hundreds of motorists, cyclists, and hikers, visited Callow Church.

"*Appeal to Motorists.*—No motorist could resist this prominently displayed appeal: '*If the car won't stop at the place where your mother used to worship—then sell it!*'"

"Two hundred motor-cyclists had camped in specially provided tents, in barns, and even the rectory itself. They were holding their annual rally and board meeting in the rectory grounds yesterday.

"After the service were played bowls, clock-golf, and croquet in the rectory grounds, while the vicar supervised the cooking of hundreds of appetising ham-and-egg breakfasts.

"'*If you do it in the right spirit, there is more real worship in playing bowls than in attending church services,*' said Mr. Manby Lloyd" (*Daily Express*) (my italics).

(iii) Or he challenges people to beat him at tennis, attendance at Church service being prescribed as the forfeit to be paid by those who are defeated.

(iv) Or he induces them to attend the early morning Communion Service by offering them breakfast in the vestry, and so on and so on. (I spare you the quotations.)

Illustrative of the straits to which the Church is reduced in the vain effort to get people to attend it, these quotations testify only too well its spiritual bankruptcy. I find it difficult to withhold my sympathy from the Rev. W. E. Spencer Tyers, who, writing in the *St. Peter's*, Edmonton, Church Magazine, plaintively asks: "Where is it all going to stop? I could suggest some interesting extensions of the scheme. Why not challenge the customers of the local public house

to a beer-drinking contest? We might also keep a pack of ecclesiastical greyhounds. But does any of it lead a solitary soul one step nearer the Cross?"

The conclusion, I fear, is inescapable: the Churches are in a bad way. If you will turn up the early chapters of my *Present and Future of Religion*, from which you have done me the honour of fairly frequent quotation, you will find a series of figures indicating the present position of religious organisations in this country. They show rapidly and continuously declining attendances at Church and Chapel; declining (but not so rapidly, since the poor little devils are usually made to go) attendances at Sunday Schools by children; declining supplies of recruits for the Ministry; declining missionary activity. Particularly striking are the figures indicating the growth of Christian agnosticism among the educated as evidenced by the answers to the celebrated *Nation* and *Daily News* questionnaires. The more educated, the less Christian! And even the less educated are less Christian than they were! Such were the lessons of the figures.

Conscious of growing weakness, the Churches are reluctantly driven to combine. When the influence of the Church has become quite negligible, the Churches may even become united. Nor is it only the Christian Churches which are putting out feelers for unity. Adversity brings strange bed-fellows, and the following quotation from the report of a Commission sent out by seven leading Protestant denominations in America to study conditions in the Far Eastern mission-field indicates the direction of the wind. The report, by the way, is concerned to recommend that Christian missionaries should not only cease to attack non-Christian religions, but should make common cause with them against Atheism.

"What becomes," says the report, "of the issues between the merits of one sacred text and another when the sacredness of all texts is being denied?"

It is no longer which prophet or which book. It is whether any prophet, book, or revelation, rite or Church, is to be trusted. The chief foe of these oracles is not Christianity, but the philosophies of Marx, Lenin and Russell.

## CHRISTIANITY IN DECLINE

The case that must now be stated is the case for any religion at all. Thus it is that Christianity finds itself, in point of fact, aligned in a world-wide issue with the non-Christian faiths of Asia."

I was talking recently to a distinguished German who has lived for some years in Russia, on the subject of the so-called persecution of Christianity in the U.S.S.R. He said that initially the Soviet was very sensitive to outside opinion in its campaign against religion, even testing it in advance by recording as facts what were only intentions. Over and over again Christian indignation in the other parts of Europe made the Government hold its hand. "Now," he said, "they are completely cynical on the subject, 'Christian Europe' is simply ignored; no such head of steam has been raised by the Churches in the moral sphere as would make them formidable."

The only branch of Christianity which, so far as I can gather, has not declined is Roman Catholicism. Logical, coherent, definite, and above all dogmatic, it offers a sure foundation to those whose feet are beset by the quicksands of modern doubt. It also denounces birth control and, therefore, ensures a plentiful supply of Catholic raw material. I find it in the highest degree significant that, although you have so recently controverted against Father Knox and taken up the cudgels against Catholicism, when you come to a rough-and-tumble with me over the whole field of Christian controversy, you have over and over again instinctively adopted the Catholic point of view and, finding the out-works thrown up by the *demi-vierge* concessions to common sense of the Anglican Church untenable, retreated in safety behind the ramparts of the citadel of Rome.

Yours ever,  
CYRIL JOAD.

XXXVII.

SUTTONCROFT,  
BICKLEY,  
KENT.

*November 5th, 1932.*

MY DEAR JOAD,

You have expressed the most unqualified admiration for Christ's ethical teaching, and cannot therefore maintain that those who have patterned their lives on Christ have failed to influence the world. Nor can you deny that in every age there have been large numbers of men who have practised what Christ preached. Surely then it is ungenerous to suggest, as you do, that Christianity has been completely ineffective.

The leaven of Christianity works slowly, and genuine Christians have been vastly outnumbered in every age by nominal Christians whose lives have been comparatively unaffected by the creed which they professed. Any country in which it was fashionable to profess Christianity and dangerous to be an unbeliever would provide you with all the rogues you want for your gallery of eminent Christians.

I agree with you that the Church was very influential in the Middle Ages, but I never suggested that the mediæval Church was in a position to impose its will where its will was in conflict with deep ingrained social customs. Theologian after theologian denounced duelling. The Church, which you represent as consistently time-serving, never ceased to insist that duelling was a sin, but the duel continued. Against this failure we may set the success of the Church in abolishing Trial by Ordeal, and in gradually suppressing that plague of the Dark Ages, private war between feudal chiefs. Here again we have an admirable example of the methods of the Church in dealing with intractable human nature. It would have been useless to excommunicate the feudal chiefs, so the Church began by coaxing them to accept a week-end truce. This, the Truce of God, was gradually

extended to include Thursdays and Fridays, and finally private war disappeared. These half-tamed barbarians often ignored the restraints which the Church attempted to impose, and often succeeded in imposing, but it is scarcely fair to blame the Church for those incidents at the siege of Jerusalem which should help us to understand the intractable pagan nature with which the Church had to deal.

Nor do modern atrocities disprove my claim that Christianity has humanised war, for it is Christianity which has taught us to condemn deeds which were condoned by pagan codes of war.

Clearly baptism does not transform by magic a Bulgarian soldier into a Christian saint, but Christianity has set a standard by which Bulgarians and others are judged. In the last great war the treatment of prisoners and enemy wounded was, with few exceptions, remarkably humane.

It is to Christianity that we owe the fact that prisoners are exchanged instead of being crucified or thrown to the lions or sent to the galleys. And even you will not deny that the Red Cross has humanised war, and that the Red Cross is a product of Christianity.

Your whole attitude to these questions is that of a skilled counsel determined to give nothing away rather than of a philosopher in search, not of evidence to support a brief, but of facts on which to form a sound verdict. You have some difficulty in explaining away the good works of the Quakers, but, whatever happens, Christianity must not be given the credit for their labours, so you dismiss the Quakers as an "unofficial Christian body," vaguely hoping that the reader may deduce that unofficial Christianity doesn't count. Even funnier is your treatment of Wilberforce. You first trot him out as a "pious Churchman" in order to discredit the churchmen who opposed him, and you then trot out Julian the apostate to discredit Wilberforce. Forgetting that it was you who first introduced Wilberforce into the discussion, you turn and rend me for referring to him. "I never knew a man," you write, "more unfortunate in some of his illustrations. For example you cite Wilberforce as a shining example of the Christian gentleman, whose virtues put into the shade those sterile Stoics." I did nothing of the kind.



It is a pity that a man with your talent and taste for controversy should spoil his effectiveness by this habitual disregard for accuracy. I contrasted the Stoic Plutarch *not* with Wilberforce but with St. Peter Claver. To illustrate the highest type of Christian character I turned to the saints, to St. Anthony of Egypt, to Camillus, to St. Theresa and to St. Peter Claver. Much as I admire Wilberforce's energetic campaign for emancipation, I admire still more St. Peter Claver's work among the negroes. Wilberforce is a good example of the fact that a man may live a heroic Christian life and yet have a blind spot. Human nature is a mass of inconsistencies, and, as genuine Saints are rare, we have to take what we can get and be thankful for men like Wilberforce in spite of their inconsistencies. It is always difficult for a man to escape from the mental prison of his age, and Wilberforce's attitude to property was the natural, if regrettable, result of his upbringing. Anglicanism in the eighteenth century had sunk to a very low ebb. Protestantism always tends to substitute the industrious apprentice for the saint as the highest type of Christian character. Catholicism by its Religious Orders keeps alive a certain respect for "Holy Poverty" even among those who have not the least intention of being poor.

Many of the nineteenth-century reformers had a blind spot on the subject of the poor. Mrs. Hannah Moore, for instance, the pioneer of elementary education, confined her curriculum to the Bible and the Catechism, and "such coarse works as may fit the children to be servants. I allow of no writing for the poor." Put that in your anti-Christian scrap-book.

As to furs, the horrible facts you mention are new to me, and I imagine are unknown to most women. But I dare say that many women who live admirable Christian lives in other respects, yet remain curiously insensitive on points such as these. You set too high a standard for human nature. You yourself, I imagine, do not always live up to your own ideals, but you would not maintain on that account that your ideals were without effect on your life.

By the way, in my rashest moment I would never suggest that the entire fur-wearing womanhood is "completely imbued with the principles of Christianity."

It is regrettable that the Christian leaven should work so slowly, and that prisons should have been what prisons were after eighteen centuries of Christianity. But the main point is that the leaven *does* work, that the slaves *were* freed, that the prisons *were* reformed, that the factory acts *were* passed, and that all these crusades were led by devoted Christians supported by Christian men.

It is characteristic that you should ignore Shaftesbury and attribute the improvement in labour conditions to the Trade Unions alone.

Your contrast between Julian the Apostate and Wilberforce illustrates my point, not yours. Julian was a characteristic pagan in his fondness for moral apothegms, but I should be interested to hear of any permanent reform which we owe to Julian. I repeat, the pagan was ineffective as a reformer, and it needed the dynamic of Christian idealism to free the slaves, to reform the prisons and to humanise the code of war.

I am surprised that you, an ardent descendant-worshipper and believer in progressive evolution, should maintain that human nature has changed very little since pagan times. Needless to say I agree with you.

Most scientists believe that acquired characteristics are not inherited. The fact, then, that a child's ancestors have been humanised by a Christian environment does not affect the child itself. He starts life with much the same bundle of instincts and much the same propensities to cruelty and sin as did his remote pagan ancestors.

But the child of to-day starts with one advantage. He is born into a world which has to some extent been leavened by Christian idealism. The world is, of course, only imperfectly influenced by Christianity, but the Devil has had to give ground at some points, and the territory thus annexed marks a small but definite gain. Christianity has set a standard which the world ignores in many matters, but respects in some. Your whole attack is, in fact, an unconscious tribute to Christianity, for you judge Christians by the standards which Christ set. Many of the crimes which you condemn would have passed without notice and without reproof in the pagan world. Whatever may be the case with some of the Churches, the prestige and influence of Christ has never been greater

than it is to-day. Those who reject his div<sup>d</sup> taste for con-  
 pathetically anxious to prove that they are mor<sup>e</sup> this habitual  
 their ideals than any Pope or Bishop. Even a Plutarch *not*  
 to preach "practical Christianity." Indeed, on<sup>To</sup> illustrate  
 the impression that if Christ came again he would in the saints,  
 repel a deputation headed by the Archbishops of Cantua and  
 and York and insist that Messrs. Julian Huxley, Geisler  
 Heard and H. G. Wells should be presented to him.

And now let me deal with the new batch of selections from  
 your bedside scrapbook. I agree with you in condemning  
 stunts as a method of filling churches. For one man who is  
 attracted by such methods, ten are repelled.

I do not agree that the influence of Christianity is declining.  
 Church-going is no longer fashionable, and the sort of person  
 who used to sleep in the family pew now takes his Sunday nap  
 in the golf house. The genuine as opposed to the nominal  
 Christian has always formed a small minority of the popu-  
 lation, and this minority shows signs of increasing rather than  
 decreasing. Protestantism in so far as it is infected by Mod-  
 ernism is certainly declining. In Switzerland, for instance,  
 Protestantism has lost all contact with historic Christianity,  
 and, as a result, Protestantism is dead or dying. But I was  
 delayed for hours when motoring through a Catholic canton  
 by the Corpus Christi processions, in which the entire canton  
 appeared to be taking part. Rome, as you regretfully note,  
 is not declining. Her low-water mark was the eighteenth  
 century. The enlightened thinkers of those days really be-  
 lieved that Catholicism was rapidly disappearing. The en-  
 lightened thinkers of to-day are not as unenlightened as all  
 that. The last hundred years has seen a remarkable increase  
 in the Religious Orders. There are, for instance, five times  
 as many Benedictines in the world to-day as in the eighteenth  
 century, and there are more men and women in Religious  
 Orders in modern England than there were just before the  
 Reformation.

The Churches outside Rome are vital in proportion as  
 they retain their belief in the supernatural, and ineffective in  
 proportion as they make concessions to modernism. The  
 Anglo-Catholic movement, for instance, is anything but a  
 spent force, and those who remember the condition of

Anglicanism before the Anglo-Catholic revival have no reason to despair. The problem before the Church of England is the problem of authority, and that problem will perhaps be solved on the lines suggested by a Birmingham Anglo-Catholic who preached on the text, "I will pull down my barns and build better" (Luke xii 18). Meanwhile Rome has no more useful ally than Bishop Barnes.

You say I have "instinctively" adopted the Catholic point of view. Not by instinct but by reasoned choice I have defended Christianity by arguments which would have been approved by Wesley no less than by Pusey or by Bishop Gore.

You suggest that I have retreated from the outworks of modernism to the citadel of Rome. This suggestion would be more plausible if, in point of fact, I had ever been a modernist, but I have never wavered in my belief that of all irrational creeds the non-miraculous Christianity of the modernists is the most irrational. See *Difficulties*, pages 242-343, if you really believe that it is your attack which has affected my views on this point. You would certainly have had a much easier task had I abandoned the defence of historic Christianity for the defence of Modernism.

Catholicism is certainly not losing ground, but there are two varieties of religion which are rapidly losing what influence they possessed, Modernism and Utopianism.

Aldous Huxley voices the disillusion of a generation which was brought up to believe that science would provide a substitute for religion. I only wish I had read his *Brave New World* in time to quote from it when we were discussing the problem of evil. Aldous Huxley describes a state from which discomfort and pain and suffering had been banished:

"Actual happiness always looks pretty squalid compared with the over-compensations of misery. . . .

I don't want comfort, I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness, I want sin."

"In fact," said Mustapha Mond, "you're claiming the right to be unhappy."

"All right, then," said the Savage, "I claim the right to be unhappy."

No wonder that Mr. Wells was shocked. And that reminds me. I did not suggest that if I was offered the choice between an afternoon with a pious washerwoman or a lunch with the impious Mr. Wells, I should prefer the washerwoman. Clever people are much more entertaining than stupid people, but that isn't going to help them on the Day of Judgment. My point was that the Christian doctrine of the infinite value of every human soul was the foundation of our social conscience.

"The world and its future," writes Mr. Wells, "is not for the multitude but for the best." We have moved a long way from the older school of non-Christian utilitarians who tried to substitute for the Christian ideals the "greatest good of the greatest number," and we should move still further if Christianity were to lose its hold on the world.

This must be my last letter. I am sorry, for I have enjoyed our brisk exchange of blows. My wife will be pleased, for she greets the bulky envelope in your handwriting with a resigned sigh: "Oh dear! Another 'bone' from Mr. Joad. Now you'll go worrying away at that for the rest of the evening, and I shan't get a word out of you."

I shall miss my bones, for your letters have always been entertaining. They have amused even when they have incensed me. I appreciate their unfailing good humour, and I am grateful, as I have already said, for the unflagging energy of your attack. I think that, if the champions of opposing views met more frequently than they do in friendly controversy, there would be more charity in the personal verdicts which they pass on those with whom they disagree. Few people are really dislikeable, once you get to know them.

The prevailing prejudice against controversy is partly due to our English distrust of logical argument and partly to a silly confusion which equates the quarrelsome with the controversial, silly because it is the inability to see another man's point of view, which makes people quarrelsome, and the ability to understand the other man's position, which makes a good controversialist.

I suppose I have been lucky, for the people with whom I have found myself in controversy have been forgiving enough not to quarrel with me.

## THE LORD BE WITH YOU

Certainly in our case the vigour of our controversy, so far from embittering our personal relations, has had the very opposite effect. And for this reason I am all the more sorry that I have been unable to render you the best service that any man can render to a friend. My failure is due mainly to my lack of persuasive skill, but also to other factors over which I have no control. I have been impressed during this correspondence by the fact that your whole way of thinking should naturally lead you to the Church. You have none of the sectarian narrowness of Victorian unbelievers. You have an open mind on the subject of the miraculous. You concede the existence of the supernatural by your admission that the mystical experience is objectively real. You have an unstinted admiration for the Founder of our Faith. But Truth is veiled for you by a dark cloud of prejudice. Some of your prejudices are not unreasonable. Torquemada and the Borgias deserve all that they have no doubt received since they died, not only for the crimes which they sponsored, but also for the fact that they have made things unnecessarily difficult for decent people to find their way into the Church. You know Mr. Chesterton's lines:

Bad men who had no right to their good reason  
Good men who had good reason to be wrong.

Again, the Puritan background of English Christianity reinforces the prejudice against the Faith, for Puritanism transformed a religion of beauty and joy and grace into a creed of gloom and ugliness. Calvin has made far more unbelievers than Voltaire, and all the literature of the Rationalist Press Association is far less effective than the old-fashioned British Sunday. It is not Christianity but its perversions which keep you from the Faith. Am I wrong in suggesting that you experience occasional moments of uneasy doubt, moments when you recoil from the challenge of Christianity and fortify yourself with a stiff dose of your scrapbook of Christian absurdities? I do not expect you to admit this, for you have done your best to persuade me that you can see nothing in Christianity but one long record of time-serving, humbug and cruelty. Which is odd, for even among those

A. L. TO C. E. M. J.

who reject the Faith the inability to see the sun for the sun-spots is not a universal malady.

If only I could persuade you to make a heroic effort and to approach this problem with an open mind! *Indue magni viri animum et ab opinionibus vulgi secede paulisper*. Believe me, the wall which separates you from the Church is tall rather than wide, showy rather than substantial. One determined shove and it would collapse. *Non es longe a regno Dei*, but in these matters I fear, a miss is as bad as a mile.

Well, I am an optimist, and I shall continue faintly to hope that you, whose attitude is to-day much the same as mine was in years past, will one day discover the clue to your perplexities in the historic Faith of Christendom.

Yours ever,

ARNOLD LUNN.

## XXXVIII.

4, EAST HEATH ROAD,  
N.W. 3.  
*November 11th, 1932.*

MY DEAR LUNN,

Now for the bouquets! First of all, I have enjoyed it. We are both of us controversial animals, and I, at least, have had a good many controversies in my time, but never one that I have enjoyed so thoroughly. We have kept our tempers; we have avoided personalities; we have not equated disagreement with sin, and, if we have only amused our readers as much as you have succeeded in amusing me, our book should be a source of innocent pleasure to many. Moreover, I have had throughout the sense of an opponent worthy of my steel, and in realising how effective the opposition was, I have had, too, a flattered sense of my own controversial excellence in provoking it.

Withal, we have been at it hammer and tongs. I am grieved to hear that you only worried over my letters; I blenched at yours. When these bulky screeds arrived, inadequately typed upon the sulphurous yellow paper that you have unaccountably chosen for our correspondence, punctuated less by commas and colons than by your vagaries of spelling, which I understand not to be mistakes, but the offspring of the peculiar kind of phonetic diction you affect—when, I say, these surprising missives have arrived, my heart has dropped at their very aspect. As I read, it has dropped lower and lower, until by the time I have finished the tale of my errors of fact, faults of reasoning, perversions of truth, exaggerations, distortions, muddle-headedness, pigheadedness and general incompetence, it has ended in my controversial boots. It has usually been some hours before I have taken courage to read again, and I have generally had to take not only courage, but a good meal and a little wine before replying. You have scored notably on occasion, over the Middle Ages, for example, and monasticism—and you did well over the



cultural effects of Christianity. Having said so much, it is only fair to add that I have finished my own letters with a feeling of triumph no less intense than my abasement on finishing yours. As you say, we have much in common.

I concede to you that the world is sick for want of a faith, and that a wistful agnosticism is one of the chief characteristics of the age. I concede that, lacking a faith, we have most of us lost our sense of values. We are so busy getting what we want that most of us have lost the ability to find out whether we really want it, so busy thinking that we have no time to stop and think. I concede further—although, perhaps, this is no concession to a “Churchman”—that, if Christianity were taught and preached by its exponents to-day as its founder taught and preached it, it might still provide the faith and might even provide the values. I concede also that God may in some sense exist.

And here I reach the limit of my concessions. Here, then, perhaps, I should stop; but controversy is more than courtesy, and I continue.

Reading through these letters I find that there are three insurmountable stumbling-blocks, three matters upon which, if you like, I am prejudiced, which prevent me from giving the push to that wall of yours which, although so tall, is, you say, so narrow.

First, the problem of pain and evil. I cannot have it, and will not that a God, such as the one in which you believe, made this world. That is why, although I concede the possibility of God and, to the scandal of many Rationalists, admit that the mystics probably knew what they were talking about, He must be for me a goal, not a source. That, too, is why I do the best I can with my Life Force hypothesis upon which, perhaps deservedly, you poured such scorn at the beginning of our correspondence, saying that it was either a substitute for God, the offspring of our pretentious modern refusal to call things by their right names, or nothing at all. The Life Force may not be much, but it is at least not all-powerful; its shoulders are too narrow to be expected to bear the burden of the responsibility for this world, which will remain what it is until life can contrive something better than ourselves to alter it.

Secondly, I still think, in spite of all you have said, that the record of the Church is bad in the past and its state bad in the present; I do not like clergymen, and on the whole I think their influence harmful. If Christianity had only made its officials behave properly, I would not so much have minded that it had made them think wrongly.

Thirdly, although I concede the probable existence of a world other than the one we experience through our senses, I cannot swallow the Christian supernatural machinery. The Christian theory of the universe seems to me primitive, and its exclusive claim to truth parochial. I simply cannot understand how anybody can know the things which Christians claim to know about the ultimate constitution, nature and purpose of the universe.

And herein, I think, is the chief root of my difference from you. You, it appears, know these things; and in respect of this knowledge, which you claim to possess, you are at one with your recent antagonist, Mr. Chapman Cohen, who, as you know, was also less recently mine. For Mr. Cohen also knows, although what he knows is not what the Church knows. To the scandal of Mr. Cohen I have recently in the columns of the *Church Times* admitted that I do not know whether God exists or not, although I admit that in certain moods I am sufficiently impressed by the testimony of the mystics to concede that His existence may be probable. Mr. Cohen cannot tolerate this.

Your letter reached me by the same post as the current number of *The Free Thinker*. In it for the length of a whole article he belabours me for my agnosticism. A confident Atheism he can understand, and commends; agnosticism he finds to be weak-kneed evasion. And so he is at pains to suggest that I am either an atheist who has not the courage to say so, or a theist who is too muddled to know it. On the whole, he concludes, I do in fact believe in God. Both of you, I notice, are eager to manœuvre me into the position of believing, you in order to congratulate, Mr. Cohen in order the better to denounce me.

Now it is this certainty which you both share that astonishes, while it impresses, me. I recognise you both as men of intelligence; yet how an intelligent man can claim in this

C. E. M. J. TO A. L.

our present state of knowledge, in the very childhood of our race, this certain information about the ultimate nature of the universe, passes my understanding. I recognise your sincerity, and in many moods I envy you your conviction. But I cannot share it.

Only am I shaken when, coming the elder person over me, you aver that you yourself have passed through my stage and passed beyond it; you too, it seems, have had my doubts and shared my difficulties, but now you doubt no longer, and the difficulties are resolved. Well, I am always ready to give heed to the evidence of one who, having had my experiences, has outgrown them, and I give this testimony of yours due weight. But its effect, if any, must *ex hypothesi* be in the future.

You have been eloquent, alert and amusing, and you have hit hard and clean. I respect your intelligence, and I acknowledge an expert in the art of controversy; if at the end I am unable to respond to your generous appeal, to give marks to Christianity rather than to yourself, you must comfort yourself with the reflection that, if your elder person argument counts for anything, I may one day come to share your present convictions, as I apparently now share your past doubts. If I do, you may well claim to have sown in my unconscious, since my conscious self disowns it, the seed of my future conversion.

There, for the present, let it germinate—if it can.

Good-bye.

Yours ever,  
CYRIL JOAD.

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